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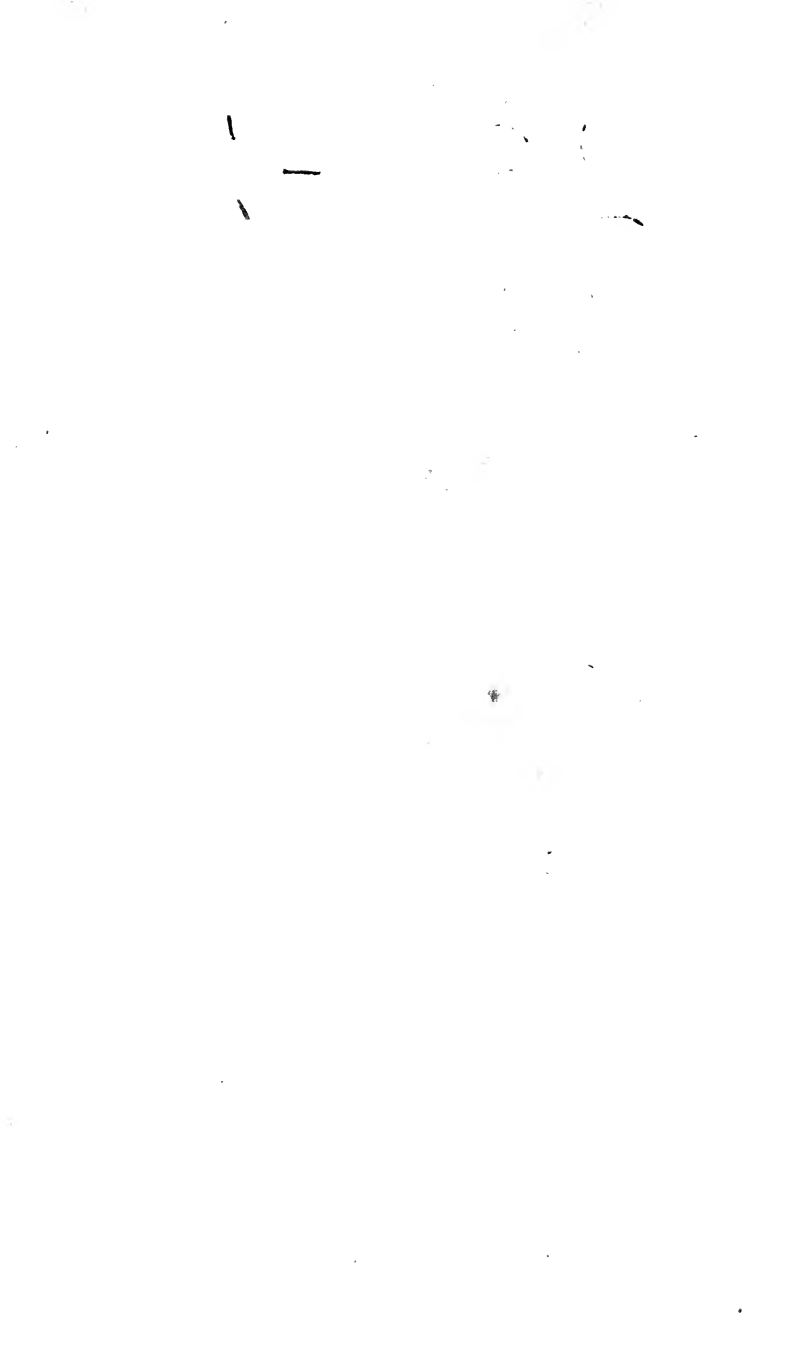
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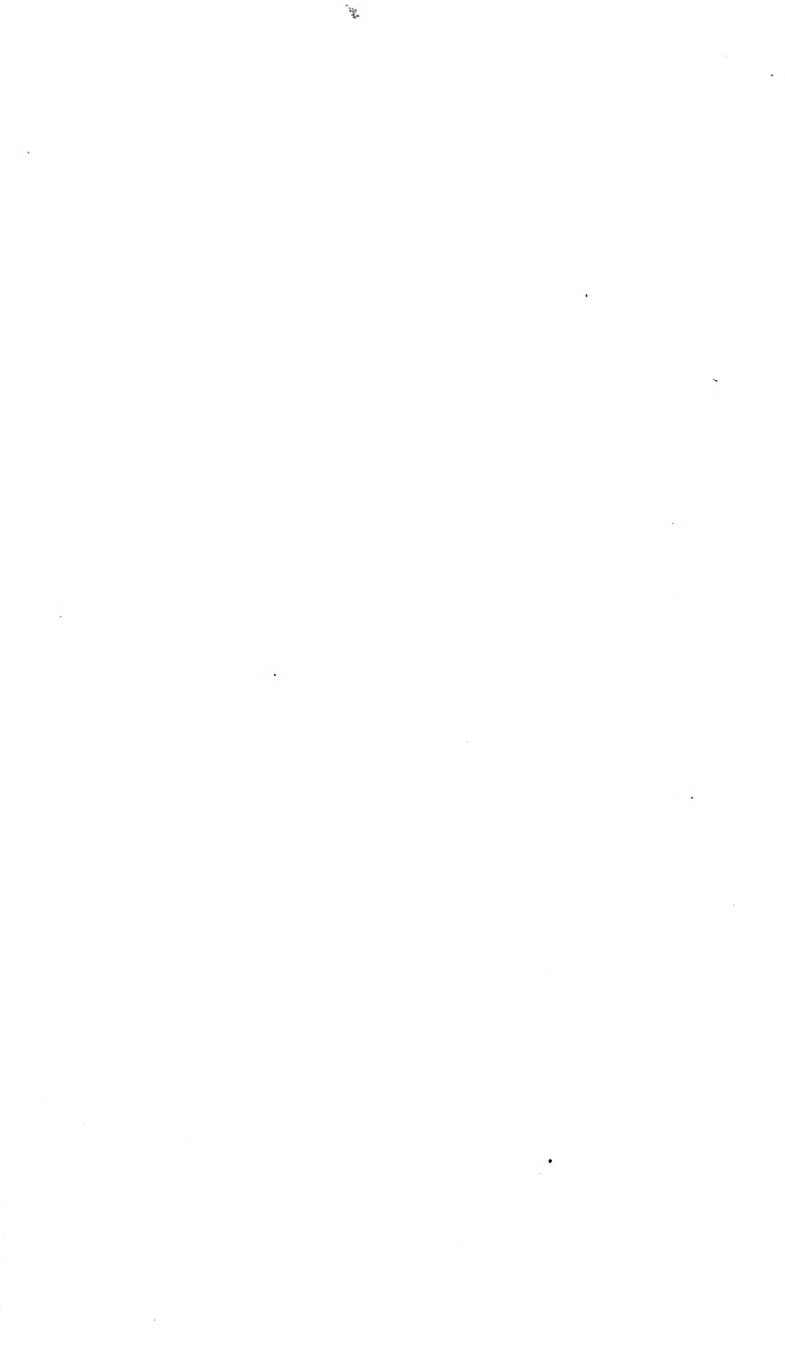
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EXPOSITION OF PSALM CXIX.

AS ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE

CHARACTER AND EXERCISES

OF

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

BY

REV. CHARLES BRIDGES, M. A.

VICAR OF OLD NEWTON, SUFFOLK.

THIRD AMERICAN, FROM THE SIXTH LONDON EDITION.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

The following notice of Bridges' Exposition of the CXIX. Psalm is from the review of the first edition by the London Christian Observer. The work passed through six editions, in England, in three years.

"To those who wish for a manual of simple piety; a book which enters into the mysteries of the Christian life; a book not of debate or controversy, but of faith, hope and charity; a book which, like Herbert's Parson, and we doubt not like the excellent author of the book itself, aspires not to be 'witty, or learned, or eloquent,' but 'holy,' we strongly recommend the present volume. It is not, however, deficient in that best 'learning' which has reference to the interpretation of Scripture, and its application to the various exigencies of the human soul; nor in that true 'eloquence' which flows from lips speaking out of the abundance of the heart on subjects best calculated to warm and elevate the affections, and to make the tongue 'the pen of a ready writer.'"

"The volume of which this is the plan, is truly scriptural in its character, and imbedded in scripture quotation, the author always referring by chapter and verse in the margin to 'the law and to the testimony.' He is evidently a sound and conscientious friend of the invaluable church to which he belongs; but we observe nothing of party spirit in his volume. He is too much absorbed in the great verities of Christian truth, too anxious for the conversion of sinners and the edification of believers, to occupy himself or his readers in matters of minor disputation."

PREFACE TO THE SIXTH EDITION.

THE writer cannot forbear any longer to acknowledge the kind indulgence, with which his work has been received by the Church of Christ. In the recollection of the many testimonies of acceptance and of usefulness which have come to his knowledge, he would earnestly pray, that he might be saved from the baneful gratification of self-complacent principle; and that he might be humbled in thankfulness before his God and Saviour for the high privilege with which He has in some measure honoured him, of ministering to the spiritual edification of his fellow-Christians.

The numerous alterations and additions, in the later editions, have not, it is hoped, altogether failed in giving increased perspicuity to the style and fulness of evangelical statement to the matter. He has endeavoured, more especially, to elevate the standard of Christian privilege, by giving such a scriptural statement of the doctrine of assurance, as may quicken the slothful to greater diligence in their Christian profession, and, at the same time, encourage the weak and fearful to a clearer apprehension of their warranted privileges.



P R E F A C E.

A considerable portion of the sacred volume (as the Book of Psalms in the Old Testament, and a large part of the several Epistles in the New Testament,) is occupied with the interesting subject of Christian Experience, and exhibits its character, under different dispensations of religion, and diversified with an endless variety of circumstances, as ever essentially the same. As the same features of countenance and elevation of stature have always marked the human species in the midst of the creation of God, so an identity of feature and "measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" has, in all ages and under every shade of outward difference, distinguished the family of God, as "the people that should dwell alone, and should not be reckoned among the nations."¹ This, indeed, was to have been expected. Human nature has undergone no change since the fall. In its unrenewed state it is still captivated in the same chains of sin; and, when renewed, it is under the influence of the same Spirit of grace. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."² We might, therefore, have conceived, that the modern believer, when employed in tracing the records of Patriarchal or Mosaical experience, will mark, in the infirmities of the ancient people of God, a picture of his own heart, "answering, as in water face answereth to face;"³ and in comparing their exercises of grace with his own, will be ready to acknowledge—"All these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will."⁴

In this view, it is the object of this work to exhibit an Old Testament believer in a New Testament garb, as one "walking in the same spirit, and in the same steps" with ourselves; and, in bringing his features of character to the evangelical standard, it is presumed, that the correspond-

¹ Numbers xxiii. 9. ² John iii. 6. ³ Prov. xxvii. 19. ⁴ 1 Cor. xii. 11.

ence will be found to be complete. "Faith which worketh by love"¹—the fundamental distinction of the gospel—pervades the whole man with, at least, an implied reference to the one way of access to God,² and a distinct regard alike to the promises,³ and to the preceptive⁴ parts of divine revelation. Nor are the workings of this principle delineated with less accuracy. In all the detail of spiritual exercises and holy conduct, we observe its operations leading the soul into communion with God, and moulding every part into a progressive conformity to his image. When we view the "man after God's own heart"—taking God for his portion⁵—associating with his people,⁶ and feeding upon his word;⁷ when we mark his zeal for his Master's glory⁸—his devotedness⁹ and self-denial¹⁰ in his Master's work—when we see him ever ready to confess his name,¹¹ to bear reproach,¹² and caring only to answer it by a more steady adherence to his service¹³—do we not, in these lineaments of character, recognise the picture of one who, in after times, could turn to the churches of Christ, and say,—“Wherefore, I beseech you, be ye followers of me?”¹⁴ or, can we recollect the Psalmist's insight into the extent and spirituality of the law of God,¹⁵ and his continual conflict with indwelling sin¹⁶—awakening in him the spirit of wrestling prayer¹⁷ and confidence in the God of his salvation¹⁸—and not be again forcibly reminded of him who has left upon record the corresponding history of his own experience—"We know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin: I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died; O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord!"¹⁹ In short, let his instance in prayer²⁰ and praise²¹ be remembered—his determined²² and persevering²³ cultivation of heart-religion²⁴ and practical holiness;²⁵ his hungering and thirsting after righteousness;²⁶ his jealous fear²⁷ and watchful

¹ Gal. v. 6. ² Verse 41, 81, 132, 135. ³ Verse 25, 32, 49, 74, 169, 170. ⁴ Verse 66, 166. ⁵ Verse 57. ⁶ Verse 63, 79. ⁷ Verse 47, 48, 97, 111. ⁸ Verse 139. ⁹ Verse 38. ¹⁰ Verse 62. ¹¹ Verse 45, 46, 115, 172. ¹² Verse 23, 69, 87, 141. ¹³ Verse 51, 78, 157. ¹⁴ 1 Cor. iv. 16. ¹⁵ Verse 96. ¹⁶ Verse 113, 163. ¹⁷ Verse 25, 28. ¹⁸ Verse 114, 176. ¹⁹ Rom. vii. 9, 14, 24, 25. ²⁰ Ver. 145—149. ²¹ Verse 164. ²² Ver. 5, 36, 80. ²³ Verse 44, 102, 112. ²⁴ Verse 30—32, 59, 60. ²⁵ Ver. 106, 167, 168. ²⁶ Verse 20, 40, 131, 174. ²⁷ Verse 161.

tenderness¹ against sin, and regard for the honour of his God;² his yearning compassion over his fellow-sinners;³ his spiritual taste;⁴ his accurate discernment;⁵ the “simplicity” of his dependence⁶ and the “godly sincerity” of his obedience;⁷ his peace of mind and stability of profession;⁸ his sanctified improvement of the cross;⁹ his victory over the world;¹⁰ his acknowledgment of the Lord’s mercy;¹¹ his trials of faith and patience;¹² his heavenly liberty in the ways of God¹³ his habitual living in his presence,¹⁴ and under the quickening,¹⁵ restraining,¹⁶ directing,¹⁷ and supporting,¹⁸ influence of his word—let these holy exercises be considered—either separately, or as forming one admirable concentration of Christian excellence—and what do we desire more to complete the portrait of a finished Christian, upon the evangelical model? Is not this a visible demonstration of the power of the word, in “perfecting the man of God, and furnishing him thoroughly unto all good works?”¹⁹

Having explained the evangelical character of this psalm, some notice may next be taken of its peculiar adaptation to Christian experience. The several graces of the Christian system, delineated in this psalm, form an excellent touchstone of the sincerity of our profession, by marking its practical influence in our daily walk and conversation;—a touchstone, which appears especially needful in this day of profession; not—as warranting our confidence in the Saviour, or as constituting, in any measure, our ground of acceptance with God; but as exciting us to “give diligence to make our calling and election sure,”²⁰ and tending to quicken our sluggish steps in the path of self-denying obedience. The writer is free to confess, that his main design, in the study of this psalm, was to furnish his own mind with a correct standard of evangelical sincerity in the habitual scrutiny of his own heart, and if, in the course of this exposition, any suggestion should be thrown out to call the attention of his fellow-Christians to this most important, but, alas! too much neglected duty, he will have reason to “rejoice in the day of Christ, that

¹ Ver. 11, 37, 133. ² Ver. 39. ³ Ver. 53, 136, 158. ⁴ Ver. 103, 140. ⁵ Ver. 98—100, 104, 129, 130. ⁶ Ver. 8, 10, 86, 116, 117. ⁷ Ver. 104, 128. ⁸ Ver. 165. ⁹ Ver. 67, 71, 75. ¹⁰ Ver. 14, 36, 72, 127, 162. ¹¹ Ver. 64, 65, 68. ¹² Ver. 81—83, 107, 123. ¹³ Ver. 32, 45. ¹⁴ Ver. 168. ¹⁵ Ver. 50, 93. ¹⁶ Ver. 101. ¹⁷ Ver. 9, 24, 30, 105. ¹⁸ Ver. 92, 143. ¹⁹ 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17. ²⁰ 2 Pet. i. 10.

he has not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.”¹ Never let it be supposed, that a diligent, prayerful, probing investigation of “the chambers of imagery,” “gendereth unto bondage.” Invariably will it be found to open the way to a more established enjoyment of the privilege of Christian assurance.—“*Hereby* we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.”² As, therefore, the preceptive part of scripture thus becomes our guide in the happy path of filial obedience, our beloved rule of duty, and the standard of our daily progress; we shall learn, in the use of it, to depend more entirely upon the Saviour, fresh energy will be put into our prayers, and the promises of pardon and grace will be doubly precious to our souls.

It cannot then be, that these views of gospel experience should be found unfriendly to the best happiness of mankind. We observe this psalm to open with a most inviting picture of blessedness, and to describe throughout the feelings of one, encompassed, indeed, with trials superadded to the common lot of men, but yet evidently in possession of a soul-satisfying portion—of a “joy, with which a stranger doth not intermeddle.”³ Of those, therefore, who would affix the stigma of melancholy to evangelical religion, we are constrained to remark—that they “understand neither what they say nor whereof they affirm.”⁴ The children of Edom have never tasted the “clusters of Canaan,” and cannot therefore form any just estimate of that goodly land. They that have spied the land, can bring a good report of it, and can tell them—“Surely it floweth with milk and honey, and this is the fruit of it.”⁵ “The work

¹ “I know of no part of the holy Scriptures” (remarks a profound divine,) “where the nature and evidences of true and sincere godliness are so fully and largely insisted on and delineated, as in the 119th Psalm. The psalmist declares his design in the first verses of the Psalm, keeps his eye on it all along, and pursues it to the end. The excellency of holiness is represented as the immediate object of a spiritual taste and delight. God’s law—that grand expression and emanation of the holiness of God’s nature, and prescription of holiness to the creature—is all along represented as the great object of the love, the complaisance, and the rejoicing of the gracious nature, which prizes God’s commandments ‘above gold, yea, the finest gold;’ and to which they are ‘sweeter than the honey and the honey-comb.’”—Edwards on Religious Affections, Part iii. Sect. iii.

² 1 John iii. 19, with 18, 20, 21. ³ Prov. xiv. 10. ⁴ 1 Tim. i. 7. ⁵ Num. xiii. 27.

of righteousness is peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness, and assurance for ever.”¹

The structure of this psalm is peculiar,—divided into twenty-two parts—agreeing with the number of the letters of the Hebrew Alphabet—each part, and its several verses, beginning with the corresponding letter of the Alphabet. The whole psalm is in the form of an ejaculatory address, with the exception of the first three verses, which may almost be considered as the preface to the whole, and one other verse towards the conclusion, where the man of God rebukes the ungodly from his presence, as if intruding into his “hiding-place,” and interrupting his communion with his God.²—It is not always easy to trace the connexion between the several verses; at least, not beyond the several divisions of the psalm. Probably nothing more was intended, than the record of the exercises of his own heart, at different periods, and under different circumstances. If, however, they are not links on the same chain, in continuous and unbroken dependence, they may at least be considered as pearls upon one string, of equal though independent value. The prominent characteristic of the psalm is a love for the word of God, which is brought before us under no less than ten different names,³ “referring to some latent and distinguishing properties of the divine word, whose manifold excellencies and perfections are thus illustrated, with much elegant variety of diction.”⁴ In many instances, however, the several terms appear to have been varied, to adapt themselves to the metre; while, perhaps, at other times, they may be promiscuously used for the whole revelation of God;⁵ that the view of its inexhaustible fulness might thus conciliate a more attentive regard to its authority, and might add fresh strength to the obligation to read, believe, love, and live in it.

If the writer may be permitted to suggest the method in

¹ Isaiah xxxii. 17. ² Verses 115, with 113, 114.

³ Such as way, law, judgments, words, statutes, commandments, precepts, testimonies, righteousness, truth.

⁴ Rev. T. H. Horne's Introduction to Scripture, Vol. ii. 536.

⁵ As a proof of the promiscuous and extended application of those terms, whose definite sense is restricted to particular parts of revelation—we may mark the use of the word “law,” applied by our Saviour to quotations from the book of Psalms. Compare John xv. 25, with Psalm xxxv. 19; lxix. 4; also John x. 34, with Psalm xxxii. 6.

which this Exposition may be best studied to advantage, he would beg to refer to the advice of the excellent Philip Henry, to his children—that they should “take a verse of Psalm cxix. every morning to meditate upon, and so go over the psalm twice in a year; and that”—said he—“will bring you to be in love with all the rest of the scripture.”¹ Not that the writer presumes to suppose that this superficial sketch will supply food for meditation year after year; at the same time he ventures to hope, that it may have its use in directing the attention from time to time to a most precious portion of holy writ; which, however unfruitful it may have proved to the undiscerning mind, will be found, by the serious and intelligent reader, to be “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”²

The composition of this work has been diversified with as much variety as the nature of the subject would allow. The descriptive character of the book will be found to be interspersed with matter of discussion, personal address, hints for self-inquiry, and occasional supplication, with the earnest endeavour to cast the mind into that meditative, self-scrutinizing, devotional frame, in which the new creature is strengthened, and increases, and goes on to perfection.—Such, however, as the work is, the writer would commend it to the gracious consideration of the great Head of the church; imploring pardon for what in it may be his own, and a blessing on what may be traced to a purer source:—and in giving both the pardon and the blessing may his holy name be abundantly glorified.³

¹ P. Henry's Life, Williams' Edition, p. 247. In conformity with this rule, we find his godly daughter writing thus in her diary: ‘1687—8, March 9, Friday morning. I have been of late taking some pains to learn by heart Psalm cxix., and have made some progress therein.’ Extracted from Mrs. Savage's MSS. in P. Henry's Life—Ditto.—As an illustration of the view given by this excellent man of the importance of this Psalm, an index is added to this work of the several matters more or less touched upon, to which, as well as to the texts referred to throughout the work, the reader's attention is invited.

² 2 Timothy iii. 16.

³ Domine Deus, quæcunque dixi de tuo, agnoscant et tui. Siqua de meo et tu ignosce et tui.—August. lib. 15, de Trin.

AN

EXPOSITION OF PSALM CXIX.

PART I.

I. BLESSED ARE THE UNDEFILED IN THE WAY, WHO WALK IN THE LAW OF THE LORD.

THIS most interesting and instructive psalm, like the Psalter itself, “opens with a beatitude for our comfort and encouragement, directing us immediately to that happiness, which all mankind in different ways are seeking and inquiring after. All would secure themselves from the incursions of misery; but all do not consider that misery is the offspring of sin, from which therefore it is necessary to be delivered and preserved, in order to become happy or ‘blessed.’”*

The character described in this verse marks, in an evangelical sense, “an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile,”† —not one who is without sin, but one who, in the sincerity of his heart, can say—“that which I do I allow not.”‡ As his way is, so is his walk—“in the law of the Lord”—“strengthened in the Lord, and walking up and down in his name,”§—his ears hearing “a word behind him, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when he is turning to the right hand or to the left.”|| And if the pardon of sin, imputation of righteousness,¶ the communion of saints, and a sense of acceptance with God,**—if protection in providence and grace,†† and finally and for ever the beatific vision,‡‡ are connected in the promises of God and the experience of his people with such a “way” as is here referred to, then there can be no doubt that “blessed are the undefiled in the way.” And if temporal prosperity,§§ spiritual renovation and fruitfulness,||| increasing illumina-

* Bishop Horne on Psalm i. 1. † John i. 47, comp. Acts xxiv. 16. ‡ Rom. vii. 15. § Zech. x. 12. || Isa. xxx. 21. ¶ Psalm xxxii. 1, 2, with Rom. iv. 6—8. ** 1 John i. 7. †† 2 Chron. xvi. 9. Job i. 8, 10. ‡‡ Matt. v. 8. §§ Josh. i. 7, 8. 1 Tim. iv. 8. 2 Chron. xvii. 4, 5. ||| Psalm i. 2, 3.

tion,* intercourse with the Saviour,† peace within‡ and throughout eternity a right to the tree of life,§ are privileges of incalculable value, then surely, the “walk in the law of the Lord” is “the path of pleasantness and peace.” Truly, indeed, may we say—“God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart.”||

But let each of us ask, what is the way of my heart with God? Is it always an “undefiled way?” Is “iniquity” never “regarded in the heart?” Is all that God hates habitually lamented, abhorred, forsaken. “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”¶

Again—What is my walk? Is it from the living principle of union to Christ—the only direct—the only source of spiritual life—first quickened in him—then walking in him and after him? Is this my walk steady, consistent, advancing?—as if I were listening to the heavenly voice—“I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.”**

Surely there is enough of defilement in the most undefiled way, and enough of inconsistency in the most consistent walk, to endear to us the gracious declaration of the Gospel—“If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous.”††

2. BLESSED ARE THEY THAT KEEP HIS TESTIMONIES, AND THAT SEEK HIM WITH THE WHOLE HEART.

The “testimony,” in the singular number, usually denotes the whole canon of the inspired writings; the revelation of God’s will to mankind; the standard of the faith of his people.‡‡

“Testimonies may be considered chiefly to mark the preceptive part of scripture:§§ and it is interesting to notice the connexion in which the word is used in this psalm, as denoting that spiritual delight and perfect freedom which David habitually found in the service of his God. Mark his language; ‘I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies as much as in all riches. Thy testimonies

* John vii. 17. † John xiv. 23; xv. 14, 15. ‡ Verse 165. Gal. vi. 16. Isa. xxxii. 17. § Rev. xxii. 14. || Psalm lxxiii. 1. ¶ Psalm cxxxix. 23, 24. ** Gen. xvii. 1. †† 1 John ii. 1. ‡‡ Compare Isa. viii. 20. §§ Verse 138.

have I taken as a heritage for ever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart.’*—But it is to something more than the mere outward act of obedience that this blessedness belongs.† It is that daily habit of seeking to know the will of God in order to keep it, that is intended, and that makes the promise of the Spirit so needful and so precious—‘I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.’‡ And in thus keeping the testimonies of God, the believer maintains the character of one that ‘seeks him with the whole heart.’”

Oh! how many seek, and seek in vain, for no other reason, than because they do not “seek him with the whole heart.”—The worldling’s “heart is divided, now shall he be found faulty.”§ The professor, “with his mouth shows much love, but his heart goeth after his covetousness.”|| The backslider “hath not turned unto me with his whole heart, but feignedly, saith the Lord.”¶ The faithful, upright believer alone brings his heart, his whole heart, to the Lord—“When thou saidst, Seek ye my face, my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.”** In this frame the blessing is enjoyed, and the promise made good,—“Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.”††

O let me not shrink from the question—Do I keep his testimonies from constraint or from love? Surely, when I consider my own natural aversion and enmity to the law of God, and the danger of self-deception in the external service of the Lord, I have much need to pray—“Incline my heart to thy testimonies. Give me understanding—save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies.”‡‡ And if they are blessed who seek the Lord with their whole heart, how am I seeking him? Alas! with how much distraction! with how little heart work! Am I “seeking his strength,” in order to “seek his face?”§§

Lord, search—teach—incline—uphold me. Help me to plead thy gracious promise—“I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be my people and I will be their God; for they shall return unto me with their whole heart.”|||

* Verses 14, 111. † Treasure up his Testimonies.—Bp. Horsley. ‡ Ezek. xxxvi. 27. § Hos. x. 2. || Ezek. xxxiii. 31. ¶ Jer. iii. 10. ** Psalm xxvii. 8. †† Jer. xxix. 13. §§ Verses 36, 125, 146. ||| Psalm cv. 4. || Jer. xxiv. 7.

3. THEY ALSO DO NO INIQUITY: THEY WALK IN HIS WAYS.

Was this their character from the beginning? The people of God—what were they once? Doing nothing but iniquity—without mixture—without cessation—from the fountain head.* And what are they now? “They do no iniquity.” Once were they seen “as others,† walking in the way of their own hearts,” “alienated, enemies to God.” Now “they walk in his ways.”—“He that sat upon the throne, saith, Behold, I make all things new.”‡ When he speaketh, therefore, this word concerning his people, it is done; “Old things are passed away; behold! all things are become new.”§ They have now a new nature, by which they are “born of God, and cannot commit sin; for their seed remaineth in them, and they cannot sin, because they are born of God.”|| Their hatred and resistance to sin is now as instinctive, as was their former enmity and opposition to God. But do we mean that the people of God are as “the saints made perfect,” who “do no iniquity?” Whence, then, the need of an unceasing Advocacy in heaven on their behalf, except that sin is supposed to exist within their hearts to the termination of their earthly pilgrimage? What means that supplication in the prayer of their Lord, which teaches them to ask for daily pardon and deliverance from “temptation,” as for “daily bread?”¶ No.—They are sinners still; yet not “walking after the course,” not “fulfilling the desires,” of sin. The acting of sin is now like the motion of a stone upward, violent and unnatural. If it is not cast out, it is dethroned. They are not, as before, its “willing people,” but its reluctant, struggling captives. It is not “the day of its power.”

But are we always able to say, that we sin against our better will, so that “it is not we that do it, but sin that

* “Every imagination—of the thoughts of the heart—evil—only—evil—continually.” And this “God saw”—before whom “all things are naked and open”—who searcheth the heart, and therefore cannot be mistaken. Gen. vi. 5.

But lest we should conceive this to be the picture of some generation of so peculiarly aggravated character, that the awful demonstration of his wrath could no longer be restrained, we mark this testimony repeated by the same Omniscient Judge, immediately subsequent to the flood, (Gen. viii. 21,) and confirmed by him in many express declarations. Jer. xvii. 9, 10. Matt. xv. 19.

† Eph. ii. 2, 3. ‡ Rev. xxi. 5. § 2 Cor. v. 17. || 1 John iii. 9. ¶ Matt. vi. 11—13.

dwellleth in us?"* Is the gospel promise of deliverance from sin "sweet to us?"† And do we realize the earnest of its complete fulfilment in the successful resistance which we are enabled to make in the daily exercises of the spiritual conflict? Blessed Jesus! what do we owe to thy cross for the present redemption from its guilt and curse, and much more for the blissful prospect of the glorified state, when this hated guest shall be an inmate no more!‡ O let us take the very print of thy death into our souls in the daily crucifixion of sin.§ Let us know the "power of thy resurrection" in an habitual "walk in the newness of life."||

4. THOU HAST COMMANDED US TO KEEP THY PRECEPTS DILIGENTLY.

The Psalmist here begins to direct his address to his God, in calling to mind the obligations to obedience which the Divine command had laid upon him, and in which he felt his own happiness most nearly concerned. For even under that dispensation which "gendered unto bondage," much encouragement was connected with the "command to keep the Lord's precepts diligently." "O that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, *that it might be well with them and with their children for ever.*"¶ But surely we, under a dispensation of love, can never want a motive for obedience! Let the daily mercies of providence stir up the question—"What shall I render unto the Lord?"** Let the far richer mercies of grace produce a "living sacrifice," to be "presented to the Lord."†† Let "the love of Christ constrain us."‡‡ Let the recollection of the "price with which we were bought," remind us of the Lord's property in us, and of our obligations to "glorify him in our body, and in our spirit, which are his."§§ Let us only "behold the Lamb of God!"—let us hear his wrestling supplications, his deserted cry, his expiring agonies—the price of our redemption; and then let us ask ourselves—Can we want a motive?

But what is the scriptural view of gospel obedience? It is the work of the Spirit, enabling us to "obey the truth;"|||

* Rom. vii. 17, 20. † Rom. vi. 14. ‡ Rev. xxi. 27. § Rom. vi. 6. || Phil. iii. 10. Rom. vi. 4, 5. ¶ Deut. v. 29. Comp. Deut. vi. 17, 18; xxviii. 1, 2. Jer. vii. 23. ** Psalm cxvi. 12. †† Rom. xii. 1. ‡‡ 2 Cor. v. 14. §§ 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20. ||| 1 Pet. i. 22.

the end of the purpose of God, who “hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, *that we should be holy and without blame before him in love;*”^{*} and, finally, it is marked as the only satisfactory evidence of the sincerity of our profession.[†] Then let me make the inquiry in the morning—What is the work appointed for the day? “Teach me thy way, O Lord: I will walk in thy truth; unite my heart to fear thy name.”[‡] Let me exercise an anxious and watchful spirit, that in my daily business I may be employed in the Lord’s work. Let a guard be set upon my thoughts, my lips, my tempers, and pursuits, that nothing may hinder me, but rather every thing may assist me, in “keeping the Lord’s precepts diligently.” Let there be a trading for him with all the talents intrusted to me. What is the reason that I ever find the precepts to be “grievous” to me? Is it not that some indolence is indulged; or some “iniquity regarded in my heart;” or some principle of unfaithfulness operating to divide my service with two masters, when I should rather be conflicting with besetting hinderances, and seeking to overcome them all in “following the Lord fully?” Oh! for the spirit of “simplicity and godly sincerity” in the precepts of God. Oh! for that love which is the mainspring of diligence, warm and constant, taking the place of every other motive in leading me on in the service of God. Oh! for a large supply of that wisdom which is from above, and which is “without partiality and without hypocrisy!”[§]

5. O THAT MY WAYS WERE DIRECTED TO KEEP THY STATUTES.

The Lord has, indeed, “commanded us to keep his precepts.” But, alas! where is our power! Satan would make the sense of our weakness an excuse for indolence. The Spirit of God teaches it to us, as an incitement to prayer and an exercise of faith. If, reader, your heart is perfect with God, you “consent to the law that it is good;” you “delight in it after the inner man;”^{||} you would not have one jot or tittle altered, mitigated, or repealed, that it might be more conformed to your own will, or allow you more liberty and self-indulgence in the ways of sin. But do you

^{*} Eph. i. 4. [†] Matt. xii. 33. John xiv. 15, 21. [‡] Psalm lxxxvi. 11.
[§] James iii. 17. ^{||} Rom. vii. 16, 22, 23.

not sigh over your short-comings; aiming, indeed, at the perfect standard of holiness, yet at your best moments, and in your highest attainments, falling so far below it; seeing, indeed, the way before you, but feeling yourself without ability to walk in it? Then let a sense of your utter insufficiency for the work of the Lord lead you to the throne of grace, to pray and watch, and wait, for the strengthening and refreshing influences of the Spirit of grace. Hard, indeed, would it have been for you, if your work were left upon your own hands. But if you are constrained to confess your insufficiency “of yourself to think,” much less to do “any thing of yourself,” at the same moment of inexpressible need, you are ready to exclaim—“Our sufficiency is of God.”* Yes; “grace” will ever be found “sufficient” for the work, and “when you are weak, then are you strong.”† “Without me,” saith the Saviour, “ye can do nothing.”‡ But is your case, therefore, hopeless? Far from it. You “can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth” you.§ The “worm Jacob shall thresh the mountains,” when the Lord says, “Fear not, I will help thee.”||

But, in tracing the connexion of this verse with the preceding, we cannot forbear to remark how accurately the middle path is preserved, as keeping us at an equal distance from the idea of self-sufficiency to “keep the Lord’s statutes,” and self-justification in neglecting them. The first attempts to render spiritual obedience will quickly convince us of our utter helplessness. We might as soon create a world, as create in our hearts one acting of spiritual life, or one aspiration towards the Lord. And yet our inability does not cancel our duty. It is the weakness of a heart that “cannot be subject to the law of God,” for no other reason than because it is “carnal, enmity against God.”¶ And therefore our inability is our sin, our guilt, our condemnation; and, instead of excusing our condition, stops our mouth, and leaves us destitute of any plea of

* 2 Cor. iii. 5. † 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10. ‡ John xv. 5. § Phil iv. 13. || Isaiah xli. 14, 15.

¶ Rom. viii. 7. Compare Gen. xxxvii. 4; John viii. 43; v. 40; 2 Pet. ii. 14, where the moral inability is clearly traced to the love of sin, or the obstinate unbelief of the heart, and therefore to be inexcusable. The case of the heathen is also described in a strictly parallel view, and the evil traced to the same wilful source. Rom. i. 28.

defence before God. Thus it is evident that our obligation remains in full force, that we are bound to obey the commands of God, whether we can or not. What, then, remains for us, but to return the mandate back to heaven, accompanied with an earnest prayer that the Lord would write upon our hearts those statutes to which he requires obedience in his word?—"Thou hast commanded us to keep thy statutes diligently." We acknowledge, Lord, our obligation; but we feel our impotency. Lord, help us; we look unto thee, "O that our ways were directed to keep thy statutes." "Give what thou commandest; and then command what thou wilt."* Now, as if to exhibit the fulness and suitableness of the gospel promises, the commands and prayers are returned back again from heaven with promises of quickening and directing grace. The Lord's end with us is now fully answered. He did not issue the commands, expecting that we could turn our hearts to them, but rather that the conviction of our entire helplessness might cast us upon him, who loves to be sought, and never will be thus sought in vain. Never, therefore, do we find a command without some corresponding promise, enabling us for duty, at the very time that it commands us to it.† And in this view are brought together the supreme authority of the Lawgiver, the total insufficiency of the creature, and the all-sufficiency of "the God of all grace." We are led to pray for what we want, to be thankful for what we have, to trust for what is promised. Thus, "all is of God." He "is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last."‡ Thus "grace reigns triumphant." The foundation is laid in grace, and "the head-stone will be brought forth with shoutings, crying, Grace unto it."§ The Saviour's work is finished, and Jesus is crowned Lord of all for ever.

6. THEN SHALL I NOT BE ASHAMED, WHEN I HAVE RESPECT UNTO
ALL THY COMMANDMENTS.

The Lord expects our obedience to be not only "diligent," but universal. Indeed a partial obedience will never satisfy a child of God. To exclude any commandment from its supreme regard in the heart is the brand of hypocrisy. Even Herod could "do many things," and

* *Da quod iubes, et jube quod vis.* Augustine. † *Quod lex imperat, fides impetrat.* ‡ *Rev. xii. 13.* § *Zech. iv. 7.*

yet one evil way cherished, and therefore unforsaken, was sufficient to show the sovereign power of sin undisturbed within.* Saul slew all the Amalekites *but one*, and that single exception in the path of universal obedience, marked the unsoundness of his profession, cost him the loss of his throne, and brought him under the awful displeasure of his God.† And thus, the foot, or the hand, or the right eye, the corrupt unmortified member, brings the whole body to hell.‡ Reserves are the canker upon Christian sincerity. A secret indulgence—the rolling of the sweet morsel under the tongue—the part of the price kept back—stamps our service as a robbery, not as an offering. We may be free, sincere, and earnest in any part of our prescribed duty—but this root of bitterness renders the whole an abomination. If, then, I am a genuine believer, sincerity will be the stamp of my profession. Though ever ready to acknowledge my inability to render perfect obedience to the least of the commandments, yet my desire and purpose will seek to include the whole compass of uninterrupted obedience. I shall no more venture to break the least than the greatest of the commandments; much less shall I ever think of attempting to atone for the breach of one by the performance of the rest. They are, indeed, many commandments, yet they form but one law; and I know who has said—“Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.”§ However the professor may confine his regard to the second table, (as if the first were ceremonial or obsolete, or the regulation of the outward man were the utmost extent of the requirement,) I would have my eye fixed with equal regard to both, yet marking with especial determination any command in either of them, that may appear directly opposed to the besetting corruptions of my lusting heart. Thus “walking in the fear of the Lord,” I may hope to walk “in the comfort of the Holy Ghost,”|| and “hereby shall I know that I am of the truth, and shall assure my heart before God.”¶

But in my strictest and most persevering walk of uprightness with God, where would be my hope of acceptance, if my eye is not steadily fixed upon Him, whose obedience “fulfilled all righteousness”** in my stead, and

* Mark vi. 18—20.

† 1 Sam. xv. 12—23.

‡ Mark ix. 44—48.

§ James ii. 10, 11. || Acts ix. 31. ¶ 1 John iii. 20. ** Matt. iii. 15.

whose death “redeemed me from the curse”* of my unrighteousness, which not all my repentance, prayers, and tears could have averted from my soul? Yet, in what path, we might ask, but the way of holiness can we expect to realize the enjoyment of union and communion with our Lord?—“He that keepeth his commandments, dwelleth in him.”† We have, therefore, strong ground to suspect that assurance of the present favour of God, that is not weakened by self-indulgence, unwatchfulness, allowance of secret sins, or neglect of secret duties.—“If thou return to the Almighty,” said a wise man, “thou shalt be built up, thou *shalt put away iniquity* far from thy tabernacles. *Then* shalt thou have thy delight in the Almighty, and *shalt lift up thy face* unto God.”‡ Is it not, then, important for us to look into the nature and ground of our assurance? Will it abide the test of the word of God? Is it productive of tenderness of conscience, watchfulness, and circumspection of conduct? Does it exercise our souls in adding grace to grace, that we may “make our calling and election sure,” and obtain “an entrance ministered to us *abundantly* into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ?”§ The believer’s plea for assurance is found in adherence to the path of obedience—“I have stuck unto thy testimonies; *O Lord, put me not to shame*. Let my heart be sound in thy statutes, that I be not ashamed.”||

7. I WILL PRAISE THEE WITH UPRIGHTNESS OF HEART, WHEN I SHALL HAVE LEARNED THY RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENTS.

The law of God is justly called his “judgments,” his “righteous judgments,” as marking his view and estimate of our character, and his rule of procedure with us in the court of heaven. David had, indeed, “learned” much of these “righteous judgments,” but so much yet remained unlearned and unknown, that his attainments seemed to be as nothing—“Thy commandment,” he exclaims, “is exceeding broad.”¶ When the apostle, after twenty years’ acquaintance with the gospel, expressed it as the one desire of his heart—“That I may know Christ.”**—it is evident that he entertained the same humbling views of

* Gal. iii. 13. † 1 John iii. 24. ‡ Job xxii. 23, 26. § 2 Peter i. 5—11.
|| Verses 31, 80. ¶ Verse 96. ** Phil. iii. 10—14.

his progress in divine knowledge, and the same exalted apprehensions of the value of treasures yet unexplored, and which, as he advanced towards higher attainments, were progressively opening before him. Conceit of knowledge is the greatest enemy to knowledge, and the strongest proof of ignorance; so that "if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know." "He deceiveth himself."* But what is the motive that enlivens the believer in the pursuit of more extended spiritual knowledge? Is it that he may live upon the airy breath of human applause? No, rather that he may praise his God with uprightness of heart. We always find, that as our mind is dark, our tongue is dumb, our lips are sealed, and we are unable to bear a testimony for our God. But when "he opens our understandings" to "learn his judgments," he will next "open our lips, and our mouths shall show forth his praise."† For when we consider his judgments, as including the whole revelation of his word, the spiritual light "of the glory of God," then open to our hearts "in the face of Jesus Christ,"‡ will tune the heart with the melody of heaven.—And this, indeed, is the end for which "his people are formed;"§ for which they "are called out of darkness into marvellous light."|| This is the daily frame in which our God will be glorified.¶ But in order to praise with uprightness of heart, great watchfulness and searchings of heart are necessary, that it may really be "out of the abundance" of what our hearts have learned of his "righteous judgments." For it is possible even for the real believer to speak of his Saviour with a secret lurking after self-exaltation. It is possible really to be seeking and serving ourselves in the very act of seeming to serve and honour him. Surely the very thought of the selfishness that defiles our holiest services of praise on earth, may well quicken our longings after that world of praise, where the flame burns active, bright, incessant—where we shall offer our sacrifices without defilement, without intermission, without weariness, without end.

* 1 Cor. viii. 2. Gal. vi. 3. † Ps. li. 15, also verses 27, 171. ‡ 2 Cor. iv. 6. § Isa. xliii. 21. || 1 Peter ii. 9.

¶ Psalm l. 23. For an example of the uprightness of heart in the service of praise here alluded to, see 1 Chron. xxix. 13—18.

8. I WILL KEEP THY STATUTES: O FORSAKE ME NOT UTTERLY.

When once under the teaching of the Lord we have "learned his righteous judgments," we shall readily form a resolution to "keep his statutes." And on this point how instructive the example of one, who instantly upon forming his resolution recollects that the performance of it is beyond the power of human strength; and therefore the next moment, and almost the same moment, follows it up with prayer: "I will keep thy statutes; O forsake me not utterly." Thus we see the inseparable and happy union of simplicity, of dependence, and godly sincerity of obedience. "Help we every moment need." "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe."* What daily reason have we to beware of self-confidence, even in the course of sincerity in the ways of God! As we lean upon an arm of flesh or upon an Almighty Saviour, we shall stumble or advance in our spiritual course. Well, then, will it be for us at all times to remember our difficulties, our discouragements, and our utter inability to overcome them. Are we once forsaken? Let it serve to correct our wantonness. Grace was given in answer to prayer; but, when given, perhaps it was not duly prized, or diligently improved. "The beloved is come into his garden," in answer to solicitation: is knocking at the door, but the spouse is "asleep." The answer to prayer was not expected, not waited for, and therefore not enjoyed; and the sleeper awakes too late, and finds herself forsaken by the object of her desire.† Again, when we have given place to temptation,‡ when "our mountain stands strong,"§ when our love for our Saviour "waxes cold," and our earnestness in seeking him is fainting,|| we must not be surprised if we are left for a time to the trial of a deserted state.

But the hidings of God's countenance are sometimes spoken of, as if it were a sovereign act, calling for implicit submission; when the cause should, at least, be sought for, and will generally be found, in some unlawful indulgence, or act of unwatchfulness or self-dependence. "Are the consolations of God small with thee? Is there any secret thing with thee?"¶ It was while David kept silence from the language of contrition, that he felt the pressure of the

* Verse 117. † Cant. iv. 16, with v. 1—6. ‡ 2 Chron. xxxii. 31.
§ Psalm xxx. 6, 7. || Cant. iii. 1—4. ¶ Job xv. 1.

heavy hand of his frowning God:* and perhaps the darkness which has sometimes clouded our paths, may be the voice of God speaking loudly to us—"Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee; know therefore and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God."†

But how blessed is the consideration, that there is good ground in the word of promise, for the prayer, "Forsake me not utterly." David knew and wrote of the Lord's everlasting faithfulness to his people; and, while he dreaded even a temporary separation from his God more than any worldly affliction, he could plead that gracious declaration, "Nevertheless, my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail."‡ And whilst we cannot place too strong a guard against presuming upon these promises, it is indispensable to spiritual restoration, that we understand and receive the full and free declarations of Scripture on this point. How many fainting souls have been refreshed by those blessed words of consolation, "For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee; with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer."§ And how many desponding hearts have been encouraged by the declaration—"My sheep shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."|| Still, like every other holy doctrine of the blessed Bible, this doctrine is liable to great abuse; and the best guard will be found in an humble, lowly, self-abased, believing frame. In our return to him, and in our seeking his return to us, we shall be led to know and enjoy more of his presence than ever. Meanwhile, let this be the language of the contrite, waiting soul: "I will wait upon the Lord that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him."¶

But is any afraid that he will, after all that he has engaged, "forsake him utterly?" Let me ask you, What evidence do you find of such desertion on your soul? Do you find your heart willing to forsake him? Are there no mournings and thirstings after the return of the Lord? He has indeed warned you that, "if you forsake him, he will forsake you."** But can you forsake him? "Let him do as

* Psalm xxxii. 3, 4. † Jer. ii. 19. ‡ Psalm lxxxix. 33. § Isaiah liv. 7, 8. || John x. 28. ¶ Isaiah viii. 7. ** Chron. xv. 2.

seemeth him good, (is the language of your heart,) I will wait for him, follow after him, cleave to his word, cling to his cross:"—"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."* Though my comfort is gone, and my assurance is clouded, yet hope remains; poor and weak, indeed, yet such as I would not exchange for the glory of an earthly crown. How plain is the seal of heavenly influence in these earnest breathings after the Saviour. Can the Lord "forsake the work of his own hands?"† Sooner should heaven and earth pass, than the faithful engagements of the gospel be thus broken.‡

PART II.

9. WHEREWITHAL SHALL A YOUNG MAN CLEANSE HIS WAY? BY TAKING HEED THERETO ACCORDING TO THY WORD.

SURELY it must be considered as a most affecting proof of the natural alienation of the heart from God, that the youth of man—the bloom and freshness of his mind—his "first love"—should, in so large a majority of instances, be devoted to the service of sin.§ Seldom indeed is the cry—"My Father! thou art the guide of my youth,"|| uttered from the heart, until the misery of wandering without a guide has been painfully felt. And even at the time that the youthful heart begins to feel the touch of Divine grace, and the desire to return homewards is first excited, the habit of wandering from God, and the long-indulged and cherished pollutions of sin seem to form an almost invincible barrier to progress. The inquiry then must be one of the deepest concern, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?" And the answer is ready at hand: Let him "take heed thereto according to the word" of God. It was thus that

* Job xiii. 15. † Psalm cxxxviii. 8. Phil. i. 6.

‡ Augustine's paraphrase of this verse is beautifully descriptive of the conflict of an exercised soul in a state of temporary desertion. "O Lord, if—lest I should be proud, and should say in my prosperity, I shall never be removed"—it pleased thee to tempt me, yet forsake me not overlong; that is, if thou hast thus forsaken me, that I may know how weak I am without thy help, yet, "*forsake me not utterly*," lest I perish. I know that of thy good will thou hast given me strength. and if thou turnest away thy face from me, I shall forthwith be troubled. "O forsake me not, that I perish not."

§ Gen. vii. 21. || Jer. iii. 4.

Joseph, in Egypt,* and Daniel, with his young companions in Babylon,† were enabled to “cleanse their way” in the midst of the defiling atmosphere around them. It was probably the recollection of this purifying efficacy of the word, that induced the venerable Beza in his will to mention, among the chief matters of thankfulness to God, the mercy of having been called to the knowledge of the truth at the age of sixteen years, by which means, during a course of upwards of seventy years’ walk with God, he “escaped the pollutions of the world through lust.” But let us not forget, that the way can be cleansed by no other process than by the cleansing of the heart; for how can a corrupt fountain “send forth” other than “bitter waters?”‡ What more suitable language therefore can be found for us than the supplications of the Royal Penitent?—“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”§ When the way and the heart are cleansed, the word has been usually the appointed means. Thus the Saviour speaks to his disciples: “Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.”|| Thus also he interceded for them to his Father: “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.”¶ The gospel hope has the same end in view: “Every man that hath this hope in” Christ “purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”** For this purpose also are the promises set before us, that “having those promises,” we might “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”†† But oh! can we lose sight of the recollection, that our way wants daily cleansing? so defiled are our actions, our thoughts, our motives—nay, more—our prayers and services. “Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults.”‡‡ “Cleanse the thoughts of my heart by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit.”§§

* Gen. xxxix. 9. † Dan. i. 8—20; iii. 12—18. ‡ James iii. 11, 12. § Psalm li. 7, 10. || John xv. 3.

¶ John xvii. 17. For a striking illustration of this subject, the reader may refer to the account of Augustine’s conversion as recorded by himself. *Confessions*. Books viii. ix. The substance of it may be found in Milner’s *Church History*, Vol. ii. 353—356, and a most instructive use is made of it, as throwing light upon the doctrine of conversion, by Dr. Owen, in his valuable work on the Spirit. Book iii. chap. vi.

** John iii. 3. †† 2 Cor. vii. 1. ‡‡ Psalm xix. 12. §§ Prayer Book.

10. WITH MY WHOLE HEART HAVE I SOUGHT THEE: O LET ME NOT WANDER FROM THY COMMANDMENTS.

WE lose much of the comfort of our religion, and sadly obscure the glory of our profession, by neglecting to bring "our whole heart" to the work of the Lord. When sin is vigorous, and our spiritual affections are dull, and various circumstances combine to put difficulties in the way of prayer, this is a crisis with the soul, when strong faith is needed to overcome and to persevere. But then it is, that the soul too commonly yields to the difficulty, and contents itself either with heartless complainings or with just sufficient exertion to quiet the voice of conscience, and produce a delusive peace within. But remember that the Lord will not be found thus. His promise is not to such seekers as these; and if we are satisfied with such a frame as this we must look for a very scanty measure of spiritual success, accompanied with the total absence of spiritual enjoyment. This however was not David's frame. In the true spirit of Christian confidence he could appeal, "With my whole heart have I sought thee." And this assurance, so far from producing self-confidence in the soul, will, as far as it is genuine, be invariably attended with peculiar apprehensions of our own weakness, and will give constant occasion for prayer—"O let me not wander from thy commandments." Yet the feeblest desire and attempt to seek the Lord, is the Spirit's rising beam in the heart, a "day of small things" not to be "despised."* It is distinguished from every other principle by the simplicity of its object—"This one thing I do." "One thing have I desired of the Lord; that will I seek after."† My God! my Saviour! "with my whole heart have I sought thee. The desire of my soul is to thy name and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early."‡ And it is when the soul is thus conscious of "following the Lord fully," that there is a peculiar *dread of wandering*. In a careless frame, or in a half-hearted frame, wanderings are not watched, so long as they do not lead to any open deviation from the way. Secret prayer will be hurried over, worldly thoughts unresisted, waste of time in frivolous pur-

* Zech. iv. 10. † Phil. iii. 13. Psalm xxvii. 4. ‡ Isa. xxvi. 8, 9.

suits indulged, without much concern. But it is not so when the heart is *fully* in pursuit of its object. There is a carefulness, lest wandering thoughts should become habitual. There is a resistance of the first step that might lead into a devious path. The soul remembers the “worm-wood and the gall,”* “the roaring lion,” and the devouring wolf; and in the recollection of the misery of its former wandering, dreads any departure from the Shepherd’s fold. This is indeed a blessed frame, and one which the flock of Christ should seek to cherish with godly jealousy. Yet let it be remembered that daily progress in the heavenly walk is not maintained by the yesterday’s supply of grace. It must flow from a fresh supply continually drawn in by humble and dependent prayer, such as—“O let me not wander from thy commandments.” “Lord, I feel my heart so prone to wander. My affections are often scattered to the ends of the earth. ‘Unite my heart to fear thy name.’† Concentrate every thought, every desire, in thyself as the one object of attraction.”

11. THY WORD HAVE I HID IN MINE HEART, THAT I MIGHT NOT
SIN AGAINST THEE.

WHAT an aggregate of guilt and misery is comprehended in this short word “sin”—the greatest curse that ever entered the universe of God, and the parent of every other curse! Its guilt is aggravated beyond the conception of thought. Injury to a Superior—a Father—a Sovereign! It seems impossible to rise in our conception, so as to give an adequate idea of its infinite malignity. Its power is misery, wherever it extends—in the heart—in the family—in the world. But it is in eternity that its power is unrestrained. Sometimes the death-bed scene casts a fearful gleam of light upon “the worm that never dieth, and the fire that never shall be quenched:”‡ but what, besides experience, can develop its full-grown horrors? How supremely important therefore to secure the object of our preservation from sin! and how wisely adapted are the means to the end! “Thy word,” (says the believer, who knows the sinfulness of his own heart, and the inefficacy of any efforts of his own to bring it into subjection)—“thy word have I hid in my heart”—there it lies as my

* Lam. iii. 19. † Psalm lxxxvi. 11. ‡ Mark ix. 44.

treasure, which I would not lose, and my rule, which I would not transgress. It is not, however, every acquaintance with the word that will prove an effectual safeguard for sin. Many indeed never allow it a moment's place within. When they have heard, "Satan cometh immediately." And many transient impressions there are of its power, of no avail for any practical benefit. In many cases also it is "choked by the cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things, and it becometh unfruitful." But whenever it falls on good ground, "the honest and good heart" "hides it, keeps it, and brings forth fruit with patience, unto perfection."* Here it "dwells richly in all wisdom," as a treasury to be resorted to, when need and occasion require; as a principle of holiness, a covering from sin. In this view it is recommended by one who had well studied its uses, and acquainted himself with its value—"My son, let them not" (the divine precepts) "depart from thine eyes: keep sound wisdom and discretion. So shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck. Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble."† David also gives us the same experience of the power of this safeguard—"By the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer."‡ And it was probably the recollection of many instances of preservation, united with a sense of continual danger, that suggested the prayer—"Order my steps in thy word, and let not any iniquity have dominion over me."§

Let us take a few illustrations of the incalculable blessing of thus "hiding the word in the heart." The world presents some insinuating bait, or some business, which appears to have the supreme claim on our attention; but what says the word?—"No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."|| Perhaps the soul may be tempted to doubt whether mercy will be extended to it; but the word says—"Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out."¶ Thus when hid in the heart, it is a preservative from unbelief. Again, the unbelieving believer, (if the expression may be allowed,) is alarmed by ridicule or persecution; but what says

* Luke viii. 15, with the whole parable. † Prov. iii. 21—24. Comp. Prov. ii. 10—15. ‡ Psalm xvii. 4. § Verse 133. || Luke ix. 62. ¶ John vi. 37.

his Saviour's word? "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you."* He fears that he shall never hold out unto the end; but here is suggested a most encouraging word for his support—"He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."† He trembles lest his sins should rise up to his condemnation; but the word again speaks—"the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin."‡ And then as to duties. When he grows indolent in spiritual services, let him hear his Saviour's reproof—"What! could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation."§ Let the sorrowful story of the agony in the garden, and the death on the cross, be treasured up in the heart, lest sin should at any time appear in less hateful colours. But how is the word to gain entrance into hearts like ours? How shall it be hid in so unkindly a soil? No power of its own, surely, could plant it there. The Holy Spirit's almighty agency must be diligently sought; for in proportion as we are filled with his gracious influences, shall we be armed, as was our Master, for the effectual resistance of our spiritual temptations."||

Lastly, connected with this subject, mark the Christian's character—"In whose heart is my law."¶—His security—"None of his steps shall slide."**—His happiness—"O how love I thy law!"††—His victory—"The word of God abideth in him, and he hath overcome the wicked one."‡‡—All infallibly provided by the promises of the covenant,—"I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts."§§ O let us not then be afraid of a close contact with the word, though the cost may be the cutting off a right hand for the saving of the life. No better test can be needed of the security of our heart with God, than a willingness to come to the searching light of his holy word.|||

12. BLESSED ART THOU, O LORD; TEACH ME THY STATUTES.

THE act of praise is at once our duty and our privilege. But in its highest exercise what does it amount to, when placed on the ground of its own merit? We clothe our

* John xv. 18. † Heb. xiii. 5. ‡ John i. 7. § Matt. xxvi. 40, 41. || Comp. Luke iv. 1, 2. ¶ Isa. li. 7. ** Psalm xxxvii. 31. †† Verse 97. ‡‡ 1 John ii. 14, with Eph. vi. 17. §§ Jer. xxxi. 33. ||| Compare John iii. 20, 21.

ideas with magnificence of language, and deck them out with all the richness of imagery, and perhaps we may be pleased with our forms of praise; but what are they in his sight beyond the offering of a contemptible worm, spreading before its Maker its own mean and low notions of Divine Majesty? If a worm were to raise its head, and cry—‘O sun, thou art the source of light and heat to a widely-extended universe,’—it would in fact render a higher praise to the sun than we can ever give to our Maker. Between it and us there is some proportion—between us and God none. Yet, unworthy as the offering confessedly is, it is such as he will not despise. Nay, more—instead of spurning it from his presence, he has revealed himself as “inhabiting the praises of Israel,”*—intimating to us, that the service of praise is “set forth in his sight as incense,” and at the same time, that it should not be as an occasional visit of a guest, but the daily unceasing exercise of one at his own home. But the act of praise in its real character depends entirely upon the frame of the heart. In the contemplative philosopher it excites nothing but barren admiration. In the believer it becomes a principle of practical comfort and encouragement. With him the character of God is always an incitement to pray, and the attempt to praise gives strength and confidence to prayer. For in taking up the song of praise, can we forget who the Christian’s God is, and what the revelation is which he has been pleased to give of himself in the gospel of his dear Son, divesting every attribute of its terrors, and shining before us in all the glory of his faithfulness and love? The ascription of praise—“Blessed art thou, O Lord”—leads us therefore to take up the prophet’s song of triumph—“Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.”† Truly then he is “blessed” in himself, and delights to communicate his blessedness to his people. Therefore we are emboldened to ask for continual “teaching in his statutes,”‡—in the truths which he has revealed, and the precepts which he has enjoined, that we may “walk” with him “in love,” and “be followers of him as

* Psalm xxii. 3. † Micah vii. 18.

‡ Compare verses 64, 68, where the same acknowledgment and the same plea are again made.

dear children.”* The blessedness of this privilege is its influence upon the heart—Man’s teaching puffeth up—God’s teaching humbleth. Man’s teaching may make us more learned—God’s teaching makes us more holy. It persuades while it enlightens. It draws the heart, inclines the will, and carries out the soul to Christ.† The assurance we have for offering this petition is gathered from the tried character and faithfulness of God—“*Good and upright is the Lord; therefore will he teach sinners in the way.*”‡ And especially is this hope and expectation exercised in approaching him as our covenant God—“Lead me in thy truth, and *teach me, for thou art the God of my salvation. Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God.*”§ It is a mark of a gracious frame, that we desire the Lord’s teaching. Is it so, reader, with you? Surrounded as you are with the means of instruction, what progress are you making in the Lord’s statutes? Is your knowledge increased since the last year? Have you a deeper acquaintance with the character of God—with his holiness and love, with your own defilements, inconstancy, and weakness before him? Do you often frequent that “new and living way,”|| by which at all times you may find a free access to his throne? that only way, by which the acknowledgment of praise can ever ascend with acceptance before him? “*By him* (Christ) therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually; that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks unto his name.”¶

13. WITH MY LIPS HAVE I DECLARED ALL THE JUDGMENTS OF
THY MOUTH.

THEN may we be assured that the Lord has taught us, and is engaged to “teach us” more of his “statutes,” when we have grace in exercise to impart the knowledge which we have received to one another. ‘Teach me, that I may teach others.’ This is trading with our talents, and trading brings increase. “To every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance.”** But—“our lips are our own,”††—is the proud language of the world. Blessed be

* Eph. v. 1, 2. † John vi. 44, 45. ‡ Psalm xxv. 8. § Psalm xxv. 5. cxliii. 10. || Heb. x. 20. ¶ Heb. xiii. 15. ** Matt. xxv. 29. †† Psalm xii. 4.

God; “we are not our own.”* Has not the Lord, who fashioned our lips, the best claim to our service? And when he added to the claim of creation the right of purchase,† ought not this double claim to be a security for the employment of all that we are and all that we have to his glory? David’s readiness to declare the judgments of God’s mouth was evidently the overflowing of a heart filled with heavenly love. Is it so with us, that while we commune together, of heavenly things, we are under the influence of that unction that cometh from above, and guided by a single desire to glorify our Saviour, to edify his people, and to quicken our own souls? We would indeed deprecate the guilt of sinful silence, and tremble at the denunciations against such as thus prove their unfaithfulness to God. At the same time, there may be seasons with us of great boldness of speech, when, if we were followed into our closets, our families, or our business, the mark of hypocrisy might be stamped upon our profession. “Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?”‡ For every declaration that comes out of our lips, let us seek to have our hearts “filled with the Spirit;”§ else we shall be found talking about religion, without life in ourselves, or any prospect of benefiting others; and such a “talk of the lips tendeth only to penury.”||

Now let us observe upon this subject the character of the Lord’s people—“The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment;”¶ their resolution—“My mouth shall show forth thy righteousness and thy salvation all the day, for I know not the numbers thereof;”* their prayer—“O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise;”†† their blessing—“The lips of the righteous feed many. A wholesome tongue is a tree of life.”‡‡ The example of the Saviour may be placed before us for our imitation—“I have preached righteousness in the great congregation, lo! I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest.”§§ In the same spirit the apostles were enabled to awe their persecutors into forbearance—“We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”|||

* Cor. vi. 19. † Verse 20. ‡ Rom. ii. 21. § Eph. v. 18, 19. || Prov. xv. 23; with x. 19. ¶ Psalm xxxvii. 30. ** Psalm lxxi. 15. †† Psalm li. 15. ‡‡ Prov. x. 21; xv. 4. §§ Psalm xl. 9, 10, with Luke iv. 16—22. ||| Acts iv. 20.

How sinful is it to employ our lips for any but the Lord! Yet how sadly reluctant are we to employ them for him! Surely the day, when perhaps we have been fluent in worldly conversation, and yet have neglected our opportunities for speaking a word for him, must be considered a lost day! Is there not much cause for watchfulness, prayer, and self-denial, lest by our silence we should be ashamed of him, whom by every obligation we are bound to confess? If our inability to bear a testimony for our Lord is not painful to us,* we have the greatest reason to suspect, if not the sincerity, at least the strength, of our attachment to his precious name; and we can do no better than turn into our closets with the prayer of contrition—"Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord."†

14. I HAVE REJOICED IN THE WAYS OF THY TESTIMONIES, AS MUCH
AS IN ALL RICHES.

Do we desire to bear a testimony for God—in "declaring the judgment of his mouth?" Then must we realize their supreme joy far above earthly treasures; and "of the abundance of the heart our mouth will speak." There is indeed a real joy in despising earthly joys. 'How sweet,' said Saint Augustine, referring to the period of his conversion, 'was it in a moment to be free from those delightful vanities, to lose which had been my dread; to part with which was now my joy.‡ More satisfying is the believer's rejoicing in the way of God, than that of the miser in his untold treasures. Here he may safely say to his soul, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease." And these are the only riches within the reach of all. If we are poor in this world, it is the Lord's providence. If we are poor in grace, it is our own fault.

* Comp. xxxix. 1, 2. Jer. xx. 9. † Psalm cxliii. 2.

‡ "Quas amittere metus erat, jam dimittere gaudium fuit"—Aug. Confess. Book ix. Never man in his unregenerate state, by his own confession, more strongly illustrated the truth of our Lord's declaration; "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin." (John viii. 34, with 2 Pet. ii. 19.) He describes himself actually as "wallowing in the mire," with as much delight as if he were rolling himself in a bed of spices, or perfuming himself with the most precious ointment. ("Voluntare in cœno, tanquam cinnamoni, et unguentis pretiosis.") Yet when the word pierced his heart, and brought a new bias and taste into his soul, how delightfully was his language changed in the recollection of his past "excess of riot!" "Quam suave est istis suavitatibus carere."

It is because we have despised the counsel that speaks to us,—“I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich.”* The believer’s portion includes “things present and things to come;”† something enjoyed, and much more expected; the mercies of eternity added to the blessings of time; the riches of both worlds; all assured to him by the covenant of grace “in the way of the Lord’s testimonies.” And is it not then most strange, that with such treasure in possession and in prospect, the child of God should be so unmindful of it, so careless in increasing his store, and in confirming his own interest in it? But the riches of God’s testimonies have this peculiar property, that they cease to rejoice the heart, when they are not uppermost there. Alas! do we not know something of this from our own experience? Have there not been times, when they have appeared little desirable in our eyes, and we have actually rejoiced in the accession of some worldly good, or the accomplishment of some worldly desire, more than in this heavenly treasure? And then, though the believer rejoices in the whole of God’s testimonies, and would not for all that this world can afford lose a verse or a letter of his Bible, yet there are some parts which he delights in as his peculiar treasure. A general interest in Scripture does not satisfy him. Texts, that have been directly applied to his conscience by the power of the Spirit, whether doctrinal, practical, or experimental, are especially precious; and he will be seeking to increase his little stock, until he has apprehended the full enjoyment of the whole; if indeed the fulness of that which is called “unsearchable,”‡ can ever be, in this life at least, completely enjoyed. But it was not so much in the Lord’s testimonies, as “in the way of them,” that David rejoiced—the way in which they lead—“the high way of holiness”§—the way, which is so contrary to our natural desires and inclinations, the narrow way of the cross—so revolting to flesh and blood, that none but the true sheep of Christ can ever enter, or continue to walk in it. Yet we may and must rejoice in it, as the Lord’s way, the way of his appointment, of which he hath spoken to his people—“Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.”||

* Rev. iii. 18. † 1 Cor. iii. 22. ‡ Eph. iii. 8. § Isa. xxxv. 8. || Jer. vi. 16.

15. I WILL MEDITATE IN THY PRECEPTS, AND HAVE RESPECT
UNTO THY WAYS.

How much our rejoicing in the “testimonies” of God would be increased, by a more habitual meditation upon them. But this is a resolution which the carnal mind can never be brought to make, and to which the renewed mind through remaining depravity is often sadly reluctant. But it is a blessed employment, and will repay a thousand-fold the difficulty of engaging the too backward heart in the duty. Many sincere Christians allow themselves to be very remiss in meditation. They are content with reading the word and prayer, and indolently, with scarcely a struggle or a trial, yield themselves up to the conception of inability sufficiently to abstract their minds from this employment. But does meditation hinder the exercise of other duties of equal importance? Does it not rather give strength and efficacy to them, by “stirring up the gift of God that is in us,”* and keeping the energies of the heart in a wakeful posture of conflict and resistance? If we are oppressed with the difficulty of the resolution here expressed, let us turn it into a prayer: “Lord, help me to ‘meditate in thy precepts.’” Meditation, indeed, is the digestive faculty of the soul, that which converts the word into real and proper nourishment, and seals the full enjoyment of its divine blessing and support—“Thy words were found, and *I did eat them*, and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart.”† But in this duty of meditation we are not only to include the stated times that we may be able to appropriate to the work, but the train of holy thoughts that passes through the mind during the busy hours of the day. And will it not prove a most blessed privilege, if we should find by this means an habitual flow of spiritual desires in strengthened exercise, exciting the flame of love within, till at length we are enabled to make the Psalmist’s resolution our own—“I will meditate in thy precepts?” A subject for meditation can never be wanting, if indeed the salvation of Jesus has ever been made known to our experi-

* 2 Tim. i. 6.

† Jer. xv. 16. To this text answers the definition of meditation given by Bishop Home in this verse, as “that exercise of mind, whereby it recalls a known truth, as some kinds of creatures do their food, to be ruminated upon, until the nutritious parts are extracted, and fitted for the purposes of life.”

ence. How many, while musing upon this glorious theme, have felt “the fire burn”* within, under the gracious influence of their Lord’s presence in the heart. Let us therefore chide our dull and sluggish spirits, that suffer the precious manna to lie ungathered upon the ground, that are slow to entertain these heavenly thoughts, or rather, that heavenly Guest, whose peculiar office it is to “help our infirmities,”† and especially to “take of Christ’s and show it unto us.”‡ The exercise, however, of this, as of every other duty, may prove a matter of form, or a habit that imparts neither pleasure nor profit.§ Let me then ask myself, what distinct experimental benefit have I received from the word? Do I endeavour to read it with prayerful meditation until I find my heart filled with it? And what is the practical influence of my communing with the word? Habitual “respect to the ways of God will follow” meditation in its precepts, as the invariable effect. Thus the Psalmist, elsewhere, speaks of his own case—“Thy loving-kindness is before mine eyes, *and I have walked in thy truth.*”|| The experience of Job speaks to the same point—“My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; *I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.*”¶

16. I WILL DELIGHT MYSELF** IN THY STATUTES; I WILL NOT FORGET THY WORD.

Meditation and habitual respect to the Lord’s statutes will never fail to issue in “delight”—yes, believer, and in such a delight, as, however small your attainments may be, you would rather live and die in the enjoyment of this privilege, than in the pursuit, and even in the possession, of the most satisfying pleasures of a vain and empty world. But if it be a real “delight in the Lord’s statutes,” it will

* Psalm xxxix. 3, and compare Psalm xlv. 1. † Rom. viii. 26. ‡ John xvi. 14, 15.

§ “If a chapter be read with the eye merely, while the mind remains inattentive, and the book be shut as soon as the chapter is finished, and thus, what has been read immediately escape the memory, what is there to surprise, if, after the whole Bible has been several times read through, we discover in ourselves no increase of piety and devotion.”—Professor Frank.

|| Psalm xxvi. 3. ¶ Job xxiii. 11, 12.

** “I will solace and recreate myself.”—Ainsworth.—A beautiful illustration of the refinement of the word, when the mind is tired out with the toilsome incumbering cares of the world.

be universal—when they probe the secret lurking-places within, and draw out to the full light the hidden indulgences of a lusting heart—when they call for the entire crucifixion of every corrupt inclination, and the unreserved surrender of all to the self-denying service of our God. We may mark this spirit as distinguished from the delight of the hypocrite, which is rather to “know” than to do the “ways of his God,”* and therefore which is satisfied with outward conformity, with little or no desire to understand the errors of his heart, that he might be “cleansed from secret faults.”† It will be well, therefore, to try the sincerity of our obedience, by tracing the spring of it; and the reality of our love, by its fruitfulness and active cheerfulness in our appointed sphere of duty. We may also observe here an evidence of adoption. The servant may *perform* the statutes of God, but it is only the son who “delights in them.” “The Spirit of adoption,” therefore, as the principle of delight, is the principle of acceptable obedience in the Lord’s service. And surely those who are serving him in this happy filial walk are not likely to “forget his word.” As the eye is continually turned to the object of its affection, so the eye of the soul, that has been fixed with delight in the ways of God, will be habitually resting upon them. As one of the wise heathens observed,—“I never yet heard of a covetous old man who had forgotten where he had buried his treasure.”‡ The reason is abundantly evident. His heart is in it. And thus, if our hearts “have tasted that the Lord is gracious,” if we have found a treasure in the way of his testimonies, we cannot forget the sweetness of the experience, or where to go to refresh ourselves with the repetition of it. And yet forgetfulness of his word is a source of continual complaint, and sometimes also of most distressing temptation to gracious souls. Not that there is always a real charge of guilt upon the conscience. For, as Boston somewhat quaintly observes—“Grace makes a good heart-memory, even where there is no good head-memory.” Still, however, means must be used, and helps may be suggested. Watchfulness against the influence of the world is of the first importance. How much of the good seed is choked by the springing

* Isaiah lviii. 2. † Psalm xix. 12.

‡ “Nec vero quemquam senum audivi oblitum, quo loco thesaurum obruisset.”—Cicero de Senectute.

thorns!* If our hearts are ever refreshed with spiritual delight, we should be as cautious of an uncalled for advance into the world, as of exposing an invalid's susceptible frame to a damp or unhealthy atmosphere. Whatever warmth had been kindled in spiritual duties may be chilled by one moment's unwary rush into an unkindly clime. We must also recommend increasing attention to the word, as the means of its preservation†—the acting of “faith,” without which it will “not profit”‡—the exercise of love, bringing with it a more habitual interest in the statutes§—all accompanied with unceasing prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit, made the express subject of promise for this purpose.|| Under this heavenly teaching and recollections, what delight will be found in the statutes! what blessed remembrance of his word! “O Lord God, *keep this for ever* in the imaginations of the thoughts of the hearts of thy people, and prepare their hearts unto thee.”¶

PART III.

17. DEAL BOUNTIFULLY WITH THY SERVANT, THAT I MAY LIVE AND KEEP THY WORD.

This prayer appears to have been much upon David's heart, and in the substance and object of it is again repeated.** Nor does he fail to acknowledge the answer to it.†† We may remark from it, that those who have been taught to prize the throne of grace, have learned not to ask a little of God. Coming in the name of Jesus, they feel their ground to be sure. They plead the warrant of his own command and promise—“Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it;”‡‡ and, “crying Abba, Father,”§§ they dare to expect all that a wise and indulgent Father is able to give—“Deal *bountifully* with thy servant.” And, indeed, remembering what a poor, weak, empty, and helpless creature even a gracious soul is in itself, it is not to be conceived that any thing short of a *bountiful* supply can answer the emergency. We may be too bold in our manner of ap-

* Matt. xiii. 22. † Heb. ii. 1. ‡ Heb. iv. 2. § Verse 15. || John xiv. 26. ¶ 1 Chron. xxix. 18. ** Verse 77. †† Verse 65. Comp. Psalm xiii. 6; cxvi. 7, 8. ‡‡ Psalm lxxxi. 10. §§ Rom. viii. 15. Gal. iv. 6.

proach to God,* but we cannot be too bold in our expectations from him. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also *freely give us all things?*"† What other pledge—what more encouragement can we need, why we should not draw nigh with the largest desire, and the most heavenly expectations? The act of prayer will increase the power to pray; while the enjoyment realized in the effect of prayer will stamp the duty as our highest privilege, as the support of our daily and hourly life, support, and consolation. Instead, therefore, of saying—"We have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep,"‡ let us try what faith can do—and "with joy shall we draw water out of the wells of salvation."§ Let us bring our empty vessels until not one is left.|| Yes, believer, there is indeed a bountiful supply of grace—of every kind—suited to every want—grace to pardon—grace to quicken—grace to bless. Oh! see, then, that you come not empty away. Remember who it is that pleads before the throne. Remember that the grace you need is at hand. From eternity he foreknew your case. He laid your portion by. He has kept it for the time of need, and now he only waits for an empty vessel into which to pour his supply. He is ready to show you, how infinitely his grace exceeds all thoughts—all prayers—all desires—all praises. And have not you returned from the throne of grace, with a fresh spring of devotedness in this service, with every selfish thought forgotten in the desire, that you "may live and keep his word?" Nothing touched you until you felt "the love of God shed abroad in your heart."¶ Nothing ever will touch or move the reluctant heart, but an apprehension of bountiful redeeming love. But this will never fail to influence. This it is that makes obedience easy—delightful—natural—in a manner unavoidable. It "constrains"*** to it. The soul now "lives, and keeps the word." It now lives supremely "to him that died for us and rose again."†† The Christian motto and character now is—"to me to live is Christ."‡‡ Nor, indeed, does the highest archangel, he that is nearest to

* A beautiful example of reverential approach, and of the acceptance manifested, is given in Abram's history, (Gen. xvii. 3,) and is in some degree illustrated by the private records of Luther—Note on verses 147, 148.

† Rom. viii. 32. ‡ John iv. 11. § Isa. xii. 3. || Comp. 2 Kings iv. 3—6. ¶ Rom. v. 5. *** 2 Cor. v. 14. †† 2 Cor. v. 15. ‡‡ Phil. i. 21.

the eternal throne, know a higher object of existence than this. And how encouraging the reflection, that in this glorious object, the meanest servant in the household of God is an equal participant with the most blessed inhabitant of heaven.

18. OPEN THOU MINE EYES, THAT I MAY BEHOLD WONDROUS THINGS OUT OF THY LAW.

In order to “keep God’s word,” the Psalmist here prays that he might understand it; and though under the teaching of the Spirit he had acquired “more understanding than all his teachers,”* yet we find him ever coming to his God under a deep sense of his blindness and ignorance. And this is, indeed, the invariable effect of divine teaching, so that those who have been best taught and longest taught, will be the most ready to “sit at the feet of Jesus,”† as if they knew nothing, and had every thing to learn. It is, indeed, an unspeakable mercy to know a little of the Lord, and, at the same time, to feel, that it is only a little that we do know. In this spirit we shall be longing to know more, and yet anxious to know nothing except as we are taught of God. There are, indeed, “wondrous things” to be known in God’s law, things so wondrous that “the angels desire to look into them.”‡ The exhibition of the scheme of redemption is, in itself, a world of wonders. The display of justice exercised in the way of mercy, and of mercy glorified in the exercise of justice, is a wonder that must fill the intelligent universe of God with everlasting astonishment. And yet these “wondrous things” are hid from multitudes, who are most deeply interested in the knowledge of them. They are “hid” not only from the careless and unconcerned, but “from the wise and prudent, and revealed” only “to babes”§—to those who are experimentally acquainted with that important truth, that a “man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.”|| The largest and clearest print can never assist our sight, as long as a covering remains before our eyes. The best commentary cannot enlighten the mind until “the veil is taken away” from the heart. Oh! how need-

* Verses 99, 100. † Luke x. 39. ‡ 1 Peter i. 12. § Matt. xi. 25. || John iii. 27.

ful then, is the prayer—unveil*—“open thou mine eyes.” Let the veil be taken away from the law, that I may understand it; and from my heart, that I may receive it. It is a most affecting consideration, that even Christians often find the word of God to be to them a sealed book. They go through their accustomed portion without gaining any increasing acquaintance with the light, life, and power of it, and without any distinct application of any part of its contents to their own experience. And thus it must be, whenever reading has been unaccompanied with prayer for divine influence and teaching. We not only need to have our “eyes opened to behold” fresh wonders, but also to maintain our perception of those wonders, which we have already beheld, that we may continue to behold them in a new and more spiritual light. But are we conscious of our blindness? Then let us hear the counsel of our Lord, that we “anoint our eyes with eye-salve, that we may see.”† The recollection of the promises of divine teaching are fraught with encouragement. The Spirit is freely and abundantly promised in this very character, as “the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God.”‡ If, therefore we desire a clearer insight into these “wondrous things” of revelation—if we would behold the glorious beauty of our Immanuel—if we would comprehend something more of the immeasurable extent of that love, with which “God so loved the world, as to give his only-begotten Son”§—and of that equally incomprehensible love which moved that Son so cheerfully to undertake our cause,|| we must make daily, hourly use of this important petition—“Open thou mine eyes.”

19. I AM A STRANGER IN THE EARTH: HIDE NOT THY COMMANDMENTS FROM ME.

This confession, from a solitary wanderer, would have had little comparative meaning; but in the mouth of one who was probably surrounded with every source of worldly enjoyment, it shows at once the vanity “of earth’s best joys,” and the heavenly tendency of the religion of the Bible. This appears indeed to have been ever the charac-

* Revela oculos meos. Velamen detraha oculis meis. Poli Synopsis.—Margin, Revel. Compare 2 Cor. iii. 14—16.

† Rev. iii. 18. ‡ Eph. i. 17. § John iii. 16. || Heb. x. 5—7.

ter and confession of the Lord's people, and they glory in it.* They "would not live always,"† and they are thankful to hear the warning voice, that minds them to "arise and depart, for this is not their rest."‡ And was not this especially the character not of David only, but of David's Lord? Born at an inn§—not "having where to lay his head"||—suffering hunger¶--subsisting upon alms**—neglected by his own††—"looking for some to take pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but he found none"‡‡—might he not justly take up the confession—"I am a stranger in the earth?" But, as descriptive of the condition of the child of God, it exhibits him in many most interesting points of view; distant from his proper home§§—without a fixed residence|||—with no particular interest in the world¶¶—and submitting to all the inconveniences of a stranger on his journey homewards.*** Such is the stranger's state! And what does he want? a guide, a guard, a companion—to direct, secure, and cheer his way. Now, all this he finds in the word of God—"When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee."††† Most suitable, then, is his prayer—"Hide not thy commandments from me." For thus, indeed, acquaintance with the word of God makes up all his hopes, and soothes all his sorrows. It supplies all the room of friends and counsellors. It furnishes light, joy, strength, food, armour, and whatever else the pilgrim may need on his way homewards. But let us put this subject closely to ourselves. As rational creatures, we know that "our life is even a vapour, which appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."‡‡‡ As believers we know that we cannot, and we would not call this world our home, and we are assured, that it is far better to be without it, than to have our portion in it. But do we never feel at home in the midst of our earthly comforts, and thus forget our proper character and our eternal prospects? Do we always live, and speak, and act, as "strangers in the earth?" Does our conversation in the society of the world savour of the home whither we profess to be going? To

* Abraham, Gen. xxiii. 4. Jacob, Gen. xlvii. 9. David, Psalm xxxix. 12. All, Heb. xi. 13.

† Job vii. 16. ‡ Mic. ii. 10. § Luke ii. 7. || Matt. viii. 20. ¶ Matt. xxi. 18. ** Luke viii. 3. †† John i. 11. ‡‡ Psalm lxxix. 20. §§ Heb. xi. 9. ||| 1 Chron. xxix. 15. ¶¶ Phil. iii. 20. *** Acts xiv. 22. ††† Prov. vi. 20—22. ‡‡‡ James iv. 14.

feel ourselves "strangers in the earth," and in the midst of the enjoyments of the gifts of God, to sit loose to them, as if our treasure were in heaven, is a sure mark of a gracious spirit. If the world, however, should be gaining the ascendancy in our affections, let us only turn our eyes to "the cross" of Calvary. Let that be the object of our daily contemplation—the ground of our constant "glorifying," and the world—what will it then be to us? A "crucified" object!* And, lastly, let us not forget that we are looking forward, and making progress towards a world where none are strangers—where all are the children of one family, in one eternal home. "In my Father's house," said our gracious Head, "are many mansions; I go to prepare a place for you."†

20. MY SOUL BREAKETH FOR THE LONGING THAT IT HATH UNTO
THY JUDGMENTS AT ALL TIMES.

Who would not wish to adopt this language of intense desire and affection for the ways of God, as an accurate expression of his own experience? It is such fervour as we find elsewhere delineated in the ardent longings of the believer for communion with his Saviour—"I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that ye tell him that I am sick of love. Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm; for love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave; the coals thereof are coals of fire, which have a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it."‡ Nor does this verse only mark the same expression of desire, but the same experience of enjoyment. For where is this communion of the church with her Lord to be found, but in the way of his judgments?—"Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, *those that remember thee in thy ways.*"§ Now let us contrast this experience with the Church of Laodicea, under a brighter dispensation, "neither cold nor hot,"|| and inquire which state most nearly resembles our own? But it is not only the fervour, but the steady uniformity of these desires that deserves to be remarked. Religion, with David, was

* Gal. vi. 14. † John xiv. 2. ‡ Cant. v. 8; viii. 6, 7. § Isa. lxiv. 5.
|| Rev. iii. 15.

not a rapture, but a habit; constant and uniform; “at all times.” With us such enjoyments are too often favoured seasons, happy moments; alas! only moments—why not days, and months, and years? The object of our desires is a continual spring that can never be exhausted. The affection—the longing of the soul, can never overreach its object. If, therefore, the desire is cherished, it will become the established habit—the element in which the child of God lives and thrives.—But let us make diligent search into the cause of the low ebbing of spiritual desire. Perhaps the throne of grace is not frequently visited. Or, at least, prayer for the influence of the Spirit is neglected. Or we have been unwatchful against a light, and vain, and worldly spirit, than which nothing more tends to wither the growth of spiritual things. Or, probably, the workings of unbelief have been too faintly resisted. And this is, of itself, sufficient to account for much of that dulness which is a matter of such sad and incessant complaint, since the rule of procedure in the kingdom of grace is—“According to thy faith be it unto you.”* Grace is, indeed, an insatiable principle. Enjoyment, instead of surfeiting, only serves to sharpen the appetite. Yet if we are content to live at a low rate, there will be no progress in fruitfulness or in comfort—we know, desire, and are satisfied with little, and *therefore* we enjoy but little—living as borderers on the land, instead of being able to say—“Surely it floweth with milk and honey; and *this is the fruit of it.*” This is not the thriving, the cheerfulness, the adorning of the gospel. It is rather the obscuring of the glory of our Christian profession, and of the happiness of its attendant privileges.

But, let us not complain of lukewarmness, without inquiring for the remedy against so baneful a disease. Let us beware of resting satisfied with the confession of the evil to our fellow creatures, without “pouring out our heart before the Lord.” There is a fulness of grace in our glorious Head to “strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die,” as well as at the beginning to “quicken” us when “dead in trespasses and sins.” Abundant, also, are the promises and encouragements to poor, dry, barren souls. “I will heal their backslidings—I will be as the dew unto Israel—he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots

* Matt. ix. 29.

as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive-tree, and his smell as Lebanon.”* For what purposes are promises such as these given, but that we may “fill our mouth with arguments,” when in the contrition of faith we again venture from a backsliding state to “order our cause before God?” And “will he plead against us with his great power? No—but he will put his strength in us,”† and we shall yet again “run the way of his commandments”‡ with an enlarged heart.

21. THOU HAST REBUKED THE PROUD THAT ARE CURSED, WHICH DO ERR FROM THY COMMANDMENTS.

Let the histories of Cain,§ Pharaoh,|| Haman,¶ Nebuchadnezzar,** and Herod,†† exhibit the proud under the rebuke and curse of God. He abhors their persons‡‡ and their offerings,§§—he “knows them afar off:”||| he “resisteth them:”¶¶ “he scattereth them in the imaginations of their hearts.”*** Yet more especially hateful are they in his sight when cloaking themselves under a spiritual garb—“which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou. These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day.”††† Lord, teach me to remember, that “that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in thy sight.”‡‡‡ David§§§ and Hezekiah|||| are instructive beacons in the church, that God’s people, whenever they give place to the workings of a proud heart, must not hope to escape his rebuke. “Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance on their inventions.”¶¶¶ Something of pride, probably, influences all that “do err” from the Lord’s commandments; yet doubtless “the Righteous Judge” will mark an infinite difference between those errors which arise from remaining imperfection of the renewed nature, and those which have their source in the obstinacy of the unrenewed heart. Those who are ever ready to confess collectively—“Who can understand his errors?”**** and individually—“I have gone astray like a lost sheep,”†††† are widely different in charac-

* Hos. xiv. 4—6. † Job xxiii. 4—6. ‡ Verse 32. § Gen. iv. 5, 13—16. || Exod. xiv. 15—31. ¶ Est. vii. 7—10. ** Dan. iv. 29—33. †† Acts xii. 21—23. ‡‡ Prov. vi. 16, 17. §§ Luke xviii. 11, 12, 14. ||| Psalm cxxxviii. 6. ¶¶ 1 Peter v. 5, with Prov. iii. 34. *** Luke i. 51. ††† Isa. lxxv. 5. ‡‡‡ Luke xvi. 15. §§§ 2 Sam. xxi. 1—15. |||| 2 Kings xx. 12, 18; 2 Chron. xxxii. 21. ¶¶¶ Psalm xcix. 8. **** Psalm xix. 12. †††† Verse 176.

ter from the subjects of this rebuke and curse of God—"Thou hast trodden down all them that err from thy statutes, for their deceit is falsehood."*

In meditating on this verse, let us observe the expression of the mind of God concerning pride. There is no sin more abhorrent to his character. It is as if we were taking the crown from his head, and placing it upon our own. It is man naturally making a god of himself—acting from himself—and for himself. Nor is this principle less destructive to our own happiness. And yet it is not only rooted, but it often rears its head and blossoms, and bears fruit in the hearts even of those who can truly say, they "hate and abhor" its influence. It is most like its father, the devil, in serpentine deceitfulness. It is always active; always ready imperceptibly to mix itself up with every thing. When it is mortified in one shape, it rises in another. When we have thought that it was gone, in some unexpected moment we find it here still. It can convert every thing into nourishment, even God's choicest gifts—yea, the graces of his Spirit. Let no saint, therefore, however near he may be living to God, however favoured with the shinings of his countenance, consider himself beyond the reach of this temptation. Paul was most in danger when he seemed to be most out of it, and nothing but an instant miracle of grace and power saved him from "the snare of the devil."† But no more offensive exhibition of pride presents itself to the eye of God, than that resistance to the humbling doctrine of the cross, and the humbling requisitions of the life of faith, which makes the sure foundation of the contrite sinner's hope a stumbling-block, to the destruction of the unbeliever.‡ Well, indeed, it is said, "Behold, his soul that is lifted up, is not upright in him."§ But, what! can a sinner—can a saint be proud?—one that has wasted so much time—abused so much mercy—so grieved the Spirit of God—that has a heart so full of atheism—unbelief—selfishness? Nay, the very pride, itself, should be the matter of the deepest daily humiliation, and our thus reflecting on it may, under the gracious influences of the Spirit, prove an effectual means of subduing it in our hearts: thus we shall overcome corruption by its own workings, and meet our adversary with his own weapons. And

* Verse 118. † See 2 Cor. xii. 7. ‡ Rom. ix. 32, 33. 1 Pet. ii. 7, 8.
§ Hab. ii. 4.

if we should be unable entirely to restrain the influence of this cursed principle, yet the very sight of its corruption, if it deepen the work of contrition, will be overruled for our spiritual advancement. O blessed end intended by the Lord's dealings with us! to "humble and to prove us"—"to know," and to make us know, "what was in our hearts, that he might do us good at the latter end."* Let us not frustrate his gracious intentions, or build again the things which he would have destroyed. May we love to lie low—lower than ever—infinately low before him!

22. REMOVE FROM ME REPROACH AND CONTEMPT; FOR I HAVE KEPT
THY TESTIMONIES.

THE proud under the rebuke of God are usually distinguished by their enmity to his people. It is their delight to pour upon them "reproach and contempt," with no other provocation given, than that their obedience to the testimonies of God condemns their own neglect.† If therefore we are resolved to turn our backs upon the world, and to choose a decidedly contrary course, we must take this "reproach and contempt" as our portion. Yet it is such a portion as Moses valued above all the treasures of the world;‡ it is that reproach which our Master himself "despised," as reckoning it not worthy to be compared with "the joy that was set before him."§ For did he bear his cross only on the way to Calvary? It was laid for every step of his path: it met him in every form of suffering, of "reproach and contempt." When, therefore, we consider him as taking up his daily cross in the breathing of the atmosphere of a world of sin, and in the "endurance of the contradiction of sinners against himself;"|| when we mark him consummating his course of "reproach and contempt," by "suffering without the gate,"—can we hesitate to "go forth unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach?"¶ The trial, however, in many cases, especially if cast upon us by those whom we have loved and valued, proves most severe; and, that we may not faint under it, let us follow David's example, and spread our case before the Lord—"Remove from me reproach and contempt." Perhaps contempt

* Deut. viii. 2, 16. † Heb. xi. 7. ‡ Heb. xi. 24—26. § Heb. xii. 2. || Heb. xii 3. ¶ Heb. xiii. 12, 13.

is more hard to bear than reproach—we are thought of even by our enemies, so much better than we deserve, that it strikes with peculiar poignancy. Yet when the prayer of deprecation is sent up in submission to our Father's will, doubtless some answer, and that the right answer, will be given; and whether the reproach be removed, or "grace" vouchsafed "sufficient" to endure it,* the issue will prove alike for the glory of God, and the prosperity of our own souls. But let us beware of that "way of escape," which the insincere are ever ready to pursue, in returning to the world. They dare not act to the full conviction of their consciences; they dare not confront their friends to avow the determination of forming their conduct by the principles of the word of God. This is hard—this is impossible, for those who do not bear this mark upon their foreheads—"These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth."† Far better, however, will be the heaviest oppression, under "reproach and contempt," than any such endeavour to remove it from ourselves. The desire to escape the cross convicts the heart of unfaithfulness, and will not fail to make way for tenfold difficulties in our path. Every compliance with the world against the voice of the word of God is a step into by-paths which deviate wider and wider from the straight and narrow way, brings discredit upon our profession, proves a stumbling-block in the way of the weak, and will cause us, if not actually to come short, at least to "seem to come short of the promised rest."‡

But do we really find the weight of the cross "above that we are able?" He that bore it for us will surely enable us to bear it for him; and upheld by him, we cannot sink. It is a sweet exchange, by which the burden of sin is removed, and bound to his cross; and what remains to us is the lighter cross of "reproach and contempt"—the badge of our discipleship.§ And then, if we have the testimony of our consciences that in the midst of persecution from the world, we "have kept his testimonies,"|| we have indeed a sure warrant of hope that all trials that would overpress us will be removed from us, and we shall be able to testify to our Master's praise in the churches of God, that "his yoke is easy, and his burden is light."¶

* 2 Cor. xii. 8, 9. † Rev. xiv. 4. ‡ Heb. iv. 1. § Matt. xvi. 24. || Verses 61, 69, 87, 95, 110. ¶ Matt. xi. 30.

23. PRINCES ALSO DID SIT AND SPEAK AGAINST ME; BUT THY SERVANT DID MEDITATE IN THY STATUTES.

DAVID might well give his testimony to the words of the Lord, that they were "tried words;"* for perhaps no one had ever tried them more than himself, and certainly no one had more experience of their faithfulness, sweetness, and support. Saul and his "princes might indeed sit and speak against him," but he had a resource of which they could never deprive him. "Not as the world giveth, give I unto you."† As our blessed Master was employed in communion with his Father, and delighting in his work at the time when the "princes did sit and speak against him,"‡ so, under similar circumstances of trial, in the experience of this faithful servant of God, the habit of meditation in the Lord's statutes extracted spiritual food for his support: and in this strength of his God he was enabled to "suffer according to his will, and to commit the keeping of his soul to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator."§ Not that this form of trial was peculiar to the history of David. The children of Israel in Egypt,|| Daniel in Babylon,¶ and the disciples of Christ in the early ages of the Church,** have severally found "the same afflictions to be accomplished in themselves." Never, indeed, has Christ's "kingdom been of this world."†† "Therefore, the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not."‡‡ And perhaps this is one of the gracious reasons of our trials, to make the word of God more precious by the experience of its sustaining consolations, in an hour when the arm of human power may be opposed to us. Often, indeed, from a want of a present application of the word, Christians, and especially young Christians, are in danger of being put to rebuke by the scorner's sneer. We cannot, therefore, estimate too highly the importance of an accurate and well-digested acquaintance with this precious book. In the appalling conflicts of the Christian warfare, it is "the sword of the Spirit,"§§ which, if it be kept bright by constant use, will never be wielded without the victory of faith. So many reasons may be drawn from thence against fainting under persecution, that

* Psalm xii. 6. Prayer-book Translation. † John xiv. 27. ‡ John xi. 47, 54—57. § 1 Pet. iv. 19. || Exod. i. 10. ¶ Dan. vi. 4—6. ** Matt. x. 17, 18. Acts iv. 27—29. †† John xviii. 36. ‡‡ 1 John iii. 1. §§ Eph. vi. 17.

the believer may ever be ready “to thank God, and to take courage.”* Christ has left it indeed as the portion of his people—“In the world ye shall have tribulation,” counterbalanced however most abundantly by the portion which they enjoy in him—“In me ye shall have peace.”† If therefore the one half of this portion may seem hard, the legacy entire is such as no enlightened soul can refuse to accept, or indeed will receive without thankfulness.

24. THY TESTIMONIES ARE ALSO MY DELIGHT, AND MY COUNSELLORS.

WHAT could we want more in a time of difficulty than comfort and direction? David had both these blessings. As the fruit of his “meditation in the Lord’s statutes,” in his distress they were his “delight;” in his seasons of perplexity they were his “counsellors,” directing his behaviour in the “perfect way;”‡ so that though “princes sat and spake against him,” they “could find none occasion nor fault, forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him.”§ The testimonies of God were truly “the men of his counsel.”|| He directed his own conduct by the rules laid before him in the book of God, as if he was having recourse to the most experienced counsellors, or rather as if the prophets of his God were giving the word from his mouth.¶ It seems the child of God has his counsel, as well as the sovereign. On one side we see here Saul and his counsellors,**—on the other side David and the testimonies of his God. Which, think ye, was better furnished with that “wisdom which is profitable to direct?” Subsequently, as a king, David was constrained to make “the testimonies of God his counsellors,”†† and probably to his constant regard to their voice, he owed much of his earthly prosperity.‡‡ But do we improve the privilege of being counselled in all our difficulties by the word of God? Surely then the recollection of this privilege must increase our “delight” in it. Those indeed

* Acts xxviii. 15. † John xvi. 33. ‡ 1 Sam. xviii. 14. Psalm ci. 2. § Dan. vi. 4, 5. || Margin. ¶ Comp. 2 Sam. vii. 4, 5, also xvi. 23. ** Verse 23. †† Deut. xvii. 18—20.

‡‡ 2 Sam. viii. 6, 14. Compare also his dying and most encouraging advice to Solomon on this subject, founded doubtless upon the recollection of his own experience, 1 Kings ii. 3.

who make the word of God a dull book, will ever find it a dark book. But those who make it their "delight" will never fail to find it their "Counsellors." But for the enjoyment of its holy delight and spiritual counsel in times of perplexity, we shall find a mere cursory reading of it of little avail. It must be brought home to our own experience, and consulted on those trivial occasions of every day's occurrence, when, unconscious of our need of divine direction, we are too often inclined to lean to our own counsel. It is this habitual use and daily familiarity with it, as the voice and word of God, that will ever reflect its heavenly light upon the many dark turns of our pathway to heaven. It will be to us as a "pillar and a cloud;"* as the "Urim and Thummim;"† an infallible guide and counsellor. Sometimes, however, perplexity arises from the conflict, not between conscience and sinful indulgence, (in which case Christian sincerity would at all times determine the path,) but between duty and duty. Now when duties of acknowledged obligation seem to interfere in their present claims, the counsel of the word will mark their relative importance, connexion, and dependence; their suitability to present circumstances in providence; their probable influence upon the present frame, and acting principles of the heart; the guidance which has been vouchsafed to the Lord's people in similar emergencies; and the light which the path of our Great Exemplar in the daily routine of life exhibits before us. The great concern, however, is to cultivate the habit of mind which falls in most naturally with the counsel of the word—"walking in the fear of the Lord,"‡ in simplicity of heart,§ in that spirit of dependence,|| and torn away from the idolatry of taking counsel from our own hearts, we cannot *materially* err, because there is *here a suitableness between the dispositions and the promise*—a watchfulness against the impetuous bias of the flesh; a paramount regard to the glory of God, and a meek submission to his gracious appointment. If the counsel, however, should not prove infallible, the fault is not in the word, but in the indistinctness of our own perception. We want not a clearer rule, or a surer guide, but a more single eye. And if, after all, it may not mark every precise act of duty, (for to do this "I suppose that even the world it-

* Num. ix. 15—23. † Num. xxvii. 21. ‡ See Psalm xxv. 12. § Psalm xxv. 9. || Psalm xxv. 4, 5, cxliii. 8. Prov. iii. 5, 6.

self could not contain the books that should be written,") yet it determines the standard to which the most minute acting of the mind should be brought,* and the disposition which will reflect the light of the will of God upon our path.† But let it be remembered, that any want of sincerity in the heart‡—any allowance of self-dependence,§ will ever close the avenues of this divine light and counsel. We are often unconsciously "walking in the light of our own fire, and in the sparks that we have kindled."|| Perhaps we sought, as we conceived, the guidance of the Lord's counsel, and conceive that we are walking in it. But, in the act of seeking, and as the preparation for seeking, did we feel the necessity of subjecting our motives and inclinations to a strict, cautious, self-suspecting scrutiny? Was the heart schooled to the discipline of the cross? Was "every thought brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ?"¶ Or was not our mind and heart possessed with the object, before counsel was sought at the mouth of God? Oh! how careful should we be to walk warily in those uncertain marks of divine counsel, that fall in with the bias of our own inclination. How many false steps in the record of past experience may be traced to the counsel of our own hearts, sought and followed to the neglect of the counsel of God,** while no circumstance of perplexity can befall us in the spirit of humility, simplicity, and sanctity, when the counsel of the Lord will fail.

An undue dependence upon human counsel,†† whether of the living or the dead, may also operate unfavourably to the reception of the full influence of the counsel of the word. Now, however valuable such counsel may be, and however closely it may agree with the word, we must not forget that it is not the word—that it is fallible—and therefore must never be resorted to in the first place, or followed with that full reliance, which we are warranted to place on the revelation of God. On the other hand, what is it to have God's word as our "Counsellors?" Is it not to have Himself? When our Bibles, in seasons of difficulty, are searched in an humble, prayerful, teachable spirit, we are as much depending upon the Lord himself for counsel, as if we were listening to an immediate revelation from Heaven.

* 1 Cor. x. 31. Col. iii. 17. † Matt. vi. 22, 23. ‡ 1 Sam. xxviii. 6. Ezek. xiv. 2—4. § Prov. iii. 5, 6. || Isa. i. 11. ¶ 2 Cor. x. 5. ** Jos. ix. 14. Isa. xxx. 1—3. †† Isa. ii. 22.

Let me then inquire what is the counsel of God, that speaks directly to myself. If I am an unawakened sinner, it warns me to turn from sin*—it invites me to the Saviour†—it directs me to wait upon God.‡ If I am a professor, slumbering in the form of godliness, words of gracious counsel are offered to show me my real condition§—to instruct me in the all-sufficiency of Christ,|| and to caution me of the danger of hypocrisy.¶ If through grace I am made a child of God, still do I need my Father's counsel to recover me from perpetual backsliding**—to excite me to increased watchfulness,†† and to strengthen my confidence in the fulness of his grace,‡‡ and the faithfulness of his love.§§ Ever shall I have reason for the grateful acknowledgment,—“I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel.”||| And every step of my way would I desire to advance, glorifying my God and Father in the expression of my confidence in his counsel unto the end—“Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.”¶¶ ¶¶

PART IV.

25. MY SOUL CLEAVETH UNTO THE DUST; QUICKEN THOU ME ACCORDING TO THY WORD.

No one can lay claim to the character and privileges of a believer, to whom sin is not the greatest sorrow and the heaviest burden.*** To have a “soul cleaving unto the dust,” and not to feel the trouble of it, is the black mark of a sinner, “dead in sins”—dead to God. To “know the plague of our own heart,”††† to feel our misery, to believe the remedy and to apply it to our own case,‡‡‡ is the satisfactory evidence of a child of God. Dust is the portion of the world: they wish for no better. But how strange, how humbling, that the believer should still continue to have so much connexion with the dust—so polluting as it is to the touch, the taste, and the habit of the

* Prov. i. 24—31. Ezek. xxxiii. 11. † Isa. lv. 1. John vii. 37. ‡ Hosea xii. 6. § Rev. iii. 17. || Rev. iii. 18. ¶ Luke xii. 1. ** Jer. iii. 12, 13. †† 1 Thess. v. 6. Rev. iii. 2. †† Isa. xxvi. 4. §§ Heb. xii. 5, 6. ||| Psalm xvi. 7. ¶¶ Psalm lxxiii. 24. *** Psalm xxxviii. 4. ††† 1 Kings viii. 38. ‡‡‡ Rom. vii. 24, 25.

renewed man, yet that there should be a “cleaving to it?” Alas, how close it clings! And it is this that, like the dust of the summer road, blinds our eyes, and obscures our prospects. It is this earthliness of the soul, that obstructs our brighter view of the Saviour, dims the eye of faith, and hides the glorious prospects which, if beheld in the clear horizon, would enliven and invigorate us in our heavenly way. But in the midst of conflict, humiliation, and discouragement, the believer prays—“Quicken me.” Jesus “came that we might have life;” let us come to him “that we may have it more abundantly.”* The plea is such as must “have power with God and prevail.” According to thy word—“Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.”† But how different is the character of the professor; ready, probably, to make the same confession, yet without humiliation, without prayer, without faith. Nothing is more common than to hear the complaint—“My soul cleaveth unto the dust.” The world has such power over us—we are so cold—so dead to God! whilst perhaps the complaint is never once brought to God—never accompanied with earnest wrestlings for quickening grace. Nay, more, the complaint is often the language of self-complacency, and urged as an evidence of the good state of the heart before God. Yet it is not the complaint of sickness, but an application to the physician, that advances the recovery of the patient. We do not usually expect to improve our condition, by wishing it better, or by mourning that it is so bad. Nor is it the confession of sin, but the application to him who alone is able to relieve our case, that marks the real contrition of the soul before God. When confession evaporates in heartless complaints, it has little connexion with the tenderness of a heart, whose secret springs have been touched by a gracious influence. But when the utterance of prayer flows from the expression of complaint, it is the voice of God’s own “Spirit making intercession for us,”‡ and how sweet the encouragement, that he that “searcheth the hearts, knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.”§ Some are ready to give up or delay their duty, when they have been unable to bring their heart to it. But this is indeed ‘Satan

* John x. 10. † 1 Thess. v. 23, 24. ‡ Rom. viii. 26. § Rom. viii. 27.

getting advantage of us' by our 'ignorance of his devices.' Quickening grace is not the ground or warrant for duty. Indisposition to duty is not our weakness, but our sin—not therefore to be indulged, but resisted. We must mourn over the dulness that hinders us, and diligently wait for the 'help we every moment need.' If the door is shut, it will not be long shut to him who has faith and patience to knock until it is opened. God keeps the grace in his own hands to exercise our daily dependence upon him. Now let me sift the character of my profession. Is it such as humbles me in a painful sense of short-comings? Am I never spending time in fruitless bemoanings of my state, which had been far better spent in vigorous actings of grace? If I find "my soul cleaving to the dust," am I not sometimes "lying on my face,"* when I ought to be "taking heaven by violence,"† by importunate, restless petitions for quickening grace? Are my prayers invigorated by confidence in the word of God? Is my religion an habitual, persevering, overcoming conflict with sin?

O Lord, make me more deeply ashamed that "my soul should cleave to the dust." Breathe upon me fresh influence from thy quickening Spirit. Help me to plead thy word of promise; and oh! may every fresh view of my sinfulness, while it prostrates me in self-abasement before thee, be overruled to endear the Saviour as daily and hourly more precious to my soul. For, defiled as I am in myself, in every service of my heart, what but the unceasing application of his blood, and the uninterrupted prevalence of his intercession, gives me a moment's confidence before thee, or prevents the very sins that mingle with my prayers from sealing my condemnation? Blessed Saviour! it is nothing but thy everlasting merit covering my person, and honouring my sacrifice that satisfies the justice of an offended God, and restrains it from breaking forth as a devouring fire to consume me upon my very knees!

26. I HAVE DECLARED MY WAYS, AND THOU HEARDEST ME; TEACH ME THY STATUTES.

A BEAUTIFUL description of the "simplicity and godly sincerity"‡ of the believer's "walk with God." He spreads

* Josh. vii. 10. † Matt. xi. 12. ‡ Prov. iii. 6.

his whole case before his God, "declaring his ways" of conduct with filial confidence, his ways of difficulty with holy fellowship, and his ways of sinfulness with tender contrition. It is his delight to acquaint him with all his undertakings, and to receive his direction.* to tell him his distress, that he may be guided by his counsels, confirmed by his strength, pitied by his love, and delivered by his power. And how sweet, above all, to overcome his strangeness under a sense of guilt, and to lay open his ways of sin before him "without partiality and without hypocrisy.† Then indeed he is enabled to say, "Thou heardest me." Before, it was different. "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long."‡ While the voice of ingenuous confession was suppressed, cries and lamentations were disregarded. It was not the voice of the penitent child, and therefore, "where was the sounding of his Father's bowels, and of his mercies towards him?"§ But now on the first utterance of confession from his lips, or rather on the first purpose of contrition formed in his heart, "while he is yet speaking,"|| the pardon, the full and free pardon, had been signed in heaven, and comes down with royal parental love to his soul—"I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin."¶ Oh! what cannot the child of God, in the same spirit of ingenuous confession, testify of the more than parental tenderness with which his "transgression is forgiven, and his sin covered."** And thus he gains confidence in prayer for the continued teaching of his Father's Spirit; knowing that, as he could not find the way of return at first, so cannot he now walk in it, except under the guidance of his God—"Teach me thy way, O Lord: I will walk in thy truth."†† "I have declared my" ignorance, my sinfulness, and my whole experience, before thee, in dependence on thy pardoning mercy, thy teaching Spirit and assisting grace—"And thou hast heard me." O continue to me what thou hast been, and teach me more of thyself! Are we sincere in our dealings with God? Are we daily opening our hearts before him? How often do we treat our Almighty friend as a stranger! as if we were weary of

* Comp. Psalm xxxiv. 4—6. † Comp. Psalm li. 3; lxix. 5. ‡ Psalm xxxii. 3. § Isa. lxiii. 15. || Dan. ix. 20. ¶ Psalm xxxii. 5. ** Compare Psalm xxxii. 1. Luke xv. 18—22. Prov. xxviii. 13. †† Psalm lxxxvi. 11.

dealing with him. And when we do “declare our ways” before him, are we not often content to leave it as a matter of uncertainty whether he has heard us or not? We think too little of the importance of watching for an answer to our prayers. It is such an encouragement to pray again.* It gives such a sweetness to the mercies received, when they come to us marked with this inscription—“Received by prayer.” It is not our inevitable weakness,† nor our lamented dulness,‡ nor our abhorred wanderings,§ nor our opposed distractions,|| nor our mistaken unbelief;¶ it is not any, no, nor all these, that can shut out our prayer. If “iniquity” is not “regarded in our heart,” we may always hear our Saviour’s voice—“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name. Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.”**

It is the echo of the believer that answers to this voice—“I have declared my ways, and thou heardest me: teach me thy statutes.”††

27. MAKE ME TO UNDERSTAND THE WAY OF THY PRECEPTS: SO SHALL I TALK OF THY WONDROUS WORKS.

Who is there that has ever been found to understand this way of himself? and who has ever found the Lord unwilling to show it to him? “To him that ordereth his conversation aright, will I show the salvation of God.”†† A man untaught by the Spirit of God may be able to criticise, write, and speak, of the word of God, and may discover much and explain much to others of the beauty and importance of its contents. But such a prayer as this has never ascended from his heart, and perhaps the necessity

* Psalm cxvi. 1, 2. † Rom. vii. 21. ‡ Mark xiv. 38, 40. § Verse 113. || Psalm lxxvi. 11, last clause. ¶ Mark ix. 22, 24. ** John xvi. 23, 24.

†† Every way worthy of that great man, and a most instructive illustration of Christian sincerity, was the resolution of President Edwards:—‘Resolved to exercise myself in this all my life long, viz. with the greatest openness to declare my ways to God, and lay open my soul to him—all my sins, temptations, difficulties, sorrows, fears, hopes, desires, and every thing, and every circumstance, according to Dr. Manton’s twenty-seventh sermon on the cxix. Psalm.’ Resol. 65.—Extracted from his Diary.—Works, vol. i. 16.

†† Psalm l. 23.

of it has never occurred to his mind. And it is doubtless the neglect of prayer for divine illumination, which produces those false and erroneous views of the doctrines of Scripture, which crude, unexercised minds frequently take. Instead of humbly and simply asking—"Make me to understand the way of thy precepts"—they lean to their own understanding,—trust to the bias of their own judgment, and thus become "unstable—wresting the Scriptures," if not to their final "destruction,"* at least to the destruction of their establishment and steadiness in the ways of God. And whilst the divine teaching is indispensable in order to a right knowledge of the most simple truths of God's word, (for what truth is too simple to be perverted by carnal prejudice, or misunderstood by wilful ignorance?) it will be found amply sufficient to lead us into that measure of understanding which is needful for us of those deeper and more mysterious "ways" of God, which have so often proved as rocks, upon which the weak or the self-conceited have struck, and thus "make shipwreck of their faith."† And how does this prayer remind us of the promise of the Spirit‡ to guide us into a spiritual understanding of the way and word of God—especially of the knowledge of his dear Son? With this promise in view, as the direction of his prayer, and the warrant of his faith, the simple, heaven-taught child of God takes his place at the feet of his Saviour, and prays—"Make me to understand the way of thy precepts." For he never expects to make one step of advance in divine knowledge without such a prayer as this—"If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God."§ And when we remember that a day is approaching, when the smallest attainments in this knowledge will be of infinitely greater value than all the knowledge of the world, with what earnest devotedness should we apply our hearts to a clearer acquaintance with this way, and a more steady and uniform walk in it!

But let us mark the object for which David desired understanding in the way of God's precepts—"So shall I talk of thy wondrous works." And so the humble believer will

* 2 Pet. iii. 16. † 1 Tim. i. 19. ‡ John xvi. 13—15. § Prov. ii. 3—5.

desire to know more of this way, that his tongue may be employed in commending it to others—not that he may be pleased with himself, and indulge in a self-complacent view of his attainments, but that his God may be more admired by him, and “glorified in him,”* and that he may advance himself, and lead others forward, in the fear, love, obedience, and praise of God.

It is a frequent complaint with Christians, that they are straitened in religious conversation, and often feel unable to speak “to the use of edifying that they may minister grace to the hearers.”† Here, then, is the secret disclosed by which we shall be kept from the danger of dealing in unfelt truths, and “out of the abundance of the heart our mouths will speak.”‡ Seek, then, to have the heart searched, cleansed, filled with the graces of the Spirit. Humility, teachableness, simplicity, will bring light into the understanding, influence the heart, “open the lips,” and unite every member that we have in the service and praise of God.

28. MY SOUL MELTETH FOR HEAVINESS; STRENGTHEN THOU ME
ACCORDING UNTO THY WORD.

How different the condition of the people of God from the world! and yet how much more enviable! Their “soul melteth for heaviness,”—so much of the power of sin, and so little strength in resisting it! But this is only “for a season.” “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.”§ There is a “needs be” for it while it remains, and, in the end, it will “be found unto praise and honour and glory.”|| But never are their graces more lively, or the ground of their assurance more clear, than in these sorrowing seasons of conflict. They complain, indeed, of the power of indwelling sin in all its various actings. But their complaints are the evidences of the power of grace at those very moments working mightily within them. For what is it but the principle of faith that makes unbelief their burden? What but hope that struggles with their fears? What but love that makes their coldness a grief to them? What but humility that causes them to

* Gal. i. 24. Matt. v. 16. † Eph. iv. 29. ‡ Matt. xii. 34. § Psalm xxx. 5. || 1 Peter i. 6, 7.

loathe their pride? What but the secret spring of thankfulness that shows them their unthankfulness, and shames them for it? And therefore the very depth of their "heaviness melting their souls" away, is the exhibition of the strength and establishment of God's work within, upholding them in perseverance of conflict to the end; so that the believer would not exchange his heaviest moments with the most prosperous condition of the ungodly. No—rather would he say—"Let me not eat of their dainties."* Far better, and, we may add, far happier, is godly sorrow than worldly joy. In the midst of his misery, the Christian is most happy; nor would he resign his gospel hope, though often obscured by unbelief, and clouded by fear, for "all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them." Though "the heart knoweth his own bitterness, yet a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy."† Yet, indeed, there is a bitterness that is keenly felt. Sin is the source of daily heaviness—as displeasing to a tender and gracious Father‡—as having pierced the heart that loves him,§ and shed the blood that saves him—and as "grieving"|| that beloved friend, "the indwelling Comforter of his soul." God, therefore, expects to see him a mourner, and he feels he has reason enough to mourn—"My soul melteth for heaviness." But this cry of distress is sometimes the utterance of the child under the needful chastisement of a father's love. The world is dethroned, but not extirpated in the heart. Much remains to be purged, much dross is yet to be removed. The sources of the too attractive earthly joy must be imbittered; and now it is that the discipline of the cross forces the cry—"My soul melteth for heaviness." Yet in the midst of heaviness the child of God cannot forget that he is loved—that he is saved; and the recollection of this sovereign mercy seems to make the tears with which he mourned for sin, tears of joy.

But the heaviness under which we are bowed down, has never done its appointed work until a sense of our weakness to struggle against it, has brought us to the throne of grace—"Strengthen thou me." No burden, trial, conflict,

* Psalm cxi. 4.

† Prov. xiv. 10. "A good man lying on his bed of sickness, and being asked—Which were the most comfortable days that he ever knew? cried out—O give me my *mourning* days; give me my mourning days again, for they were the joyfulest days that ever I had." Brookes's Works.

‡ Psalm li. 4. § Zech. xii. 10. || Eph. iv. 30.

or difficulty, however great, can stand before Almighty strength—"Fear not, thou worm Jacob; thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small."* And, especially, when the plea is drawn, as it is repeatedly in this psalm,† from the word and promise of God—"according to thy word"—shall we "have power with God and prevail."‡ For what is that word? "As thy days, so shall thy strength be."§ "Will he plead against me," saith Job, "with his great power? No; but he will put strength in me."|| Thus David found it in his own case—"In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength, in my soul."¶ And thus also, in the experience of the apostle, was this gracious voice given—"My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness."** Abundant encouragement also is given from the character of God—"The God of Israel is he that giveth strength and power unto his people;"†† and as a "faithful God, he will not suffer them to be tempted above that they are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that they may be able to bear it."‡‡ When we are most sensible of our utter helplessness, and most engaged in actings of reliance upon divine strength, then it is that the "soul melting for heaviness" is most especially upheld and established. Truly, therefore, may it be said—"Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop, but a good word maketh it glad."§§ And how reviving is that "good word" of the gospel, which proclaims the office of the Saviour to "give the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness,"||| and as gifted with the "tongue of the learned, that he might know how to speak a word in season unto him that is weary."¶¶ And no less encouraging is it to view him "melting for heaviness"—"being sorrowful and very heavy,"*** under the accumulated weight of imputed guilt; for by this bitter discipline "he learned," "in that he himself suffered, being tempted, to succour them that are tempted."††† Yet was he, like his faithful servant, supported according to his Father's word. For in the moment of his bitterest agony, "there appeared an angel unto him from heaven strengthening him."‡‡‡ And his people are

* Isa. xli. 14, 15. † Verses 25, 41, 58, &c. ‡ Gen. xxxii. 28. § Deut. xxxiii. 25. || Job xxiii. 6. ¶ Ps. cxxxviii. 3. ** 2 Cor. xi. 8, 9. †† Ps. lxxviii. 35. ‡‡ 1 Cor. x. 13. §§ Prov. xii. 25. ||| Isa. lxi. 3. ¶¶ Isa. l. 4. *** Mark xiv. 33. ††† Heb. ii. 13. ‡‡‡ Luke xxii. 43.

taught to expect that, "as the sufferings of Christ abound in them, so their consolation also aboundeth by Christ."* The blessed word will supply all their need—life for their quickening, light for their direction, comfort for their enjoyment, strength for their support—"Strengthen thou me according to thy word."

Lord, may I ever be kept from despondency—regarding it as sinful in itself, dishonourable to thy grace, and weakening to my soul; and though I must "needs be some time in heaviness, through manifold temptations," yet let the power of faith be in constant exercise, that I may be able to expostulate with my soul—"Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God."†

29. REMOVE FROM ME THE WAY OF LYING; AND GRANT ME THY LAW GRACIOUSLY.

EVERY deviation in principle and conduct from the strait and narrow path, is a "way of lying." Every traveller in the way is the victim of his own delusion. "He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?"‡ How needful, then, is the prayer—"Remove from me the way of lying." If at any time we "should be removed from him that calleth us into the grace of Christ unto another gospel:"§ if erroneous views of doctrine should find a place in our system of faith; if our dependence upon Christ should be mixed with a secret leaning to something in ourselves, then, indeed, this prayer will apply most fitly to our case. And if, as the natural consequence of doctrinal errors, any looseness or inconsistency should be marked in our practice; if there should be any undue concessions to the world, any allowed sinful indulgence in the heart, any shrinking from the daily cross, there will be fresh occasion for this prayer—"Remove from me the way of lying." Most justly are ways such as these called "ways of lying." They promise what it is impossible, in the nature of things, that they can ever perform, and prove to their deluded followers, that "they that observe

* 2 Cor. i. 5. † Psalm xlii. 11. ‡ Isaiah xlv. 20. § Gal. i. 6.

lying vanities forsake their own mercies.”* We can be at no loss to trace these “ways of lying” to their proper source—to him, who, “when he speaketh a lie, speaketh of his own, for he is a liar, and the father of it.”† As, in the first instance of transgression, “he beguiled Eve through his subtilty,”‡ what is his constant employment throughout a world lying under his sway, but to beguile the blinded “children of disobedience”§ into the awful deception of mistaking their God, and into the blind choice of preferring “broken cisterns” to “the fountain of living waters?”||

To have “the way of lying removed from us,” is indeed a distinguishing mercy. Yet even believers are often deviating from their course, and often have to complain that they are out of the way; probably because they neglect to pray that “the way of lying may be removed,” in the only effectual method—by the gracious knowledge of the law of God. Truth and lying can have no more “communion” in the same heart than “light and darkness,”¶ and therefore the establishment of the dominion of truth must be followed by the extirpation of its opposite.

And here the promise of the covenant ensures a supply of daily grace and heavenly teaching—“I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.”*** But let us remember the importance of watching the wanderings of our hearts, and of “keeping them with all diligence, for out of them are the issues of life.”†† They are the leading wanderers that mislead the rest. Wherever we see wandering eyes, wandering feet, and a wandering tongue, all flow from a heart that has taken its own liberty in wandering from God; let us then take the law for our rule, and the Spirit, even “the Spirit of truth,” for our guide, and we shall not only find the way marked out for us, but shall be directed and kept in the way. And let us carefully mark the gracious answer to this prayer, in a clearer perception of the truth of the law of God, a more sensitive shrinking from forbidden objects, and a more devoted attachment to the way of truth.

* Gen. ii. 8. † John viii. 44. ‡ Gen. iii. 1—6, with 2 Cor. xi. 3.
 § Rev. xii. 9, with 2 Cor. iv. 4. Eph. ii. 2. || Jer. ii. 13. ¶ 2 Cor. vi. 14.
 *** Jer. xxxi. 33. †† Prov. iv. 23.

30. I HAVE CHOSEN THE WAY OF TRUTH; THY JUDGMENTS HAVE
I LAID BEFORE ME.

ONLY two ways lie before us for our choice—"the way of lying," and "the way of truth"—God by the light of his word guiding us unto one—Satan by his temptations alluring us into the other. But until "the way of lying is removed from us," "the way of truth" must be hid. It is the Lord's teaching that shows us the way,* and his grace that enables us to "choose" it.† And does Mary regret the choice which she made? Has any believer, in the subsequent course of his experience, found reason to alter his first determination? We hear of one whose solid and reflecting judgment was not likely to make a rash or hasty choice, and who tells us, in reference to the outset of his course—"What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." And instead of repenting of the choice which he had made, the experience of twenty years only served to confirm him in it, and he repeats his determination, with increasing energy of expression: "*Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.*"‡ In the same spirit we find one of the ancient fathers expressing himself: "If I have any possessions, health, credit, learning—this is all the contentment I have of them—that I may have *something to despise for Christ, who comprises in his own person all and every thing that is most desirable.*"§ In comparing, however, this verse with the preceding, we cannot but remark a striking illustration of the bias of the believer's heart. Through the deceitfulness of a heart ever ready to "start aside like a broken bow," he feels in continual danger of deviating into forbidden paths. He therefore prays—"Remove from me the way of lying." But his choice—his heart's desire is expressed in this verse—"I have chosen the way of truth." Are we conscious of a sincere desire to have "the way of lying removed from us?" Then it is plain that we have already "chosen the way of truth," that the "Spirit of Truth" has already visited us with his gracious influence, and is "guiding us into all truth," by guiding us to Him,|| who is "the Truth,"¶ and

* Psalm xxv. 4; xxxii. 8. Isa. xlviii. 17. † Psalm cx. 3. Isai. xlv. 3—5.

‡ Phil. iii. 7, 8. § Totus desirabilis et totum desirabile.—Greg. Naz. Orat. i. || John xvi. 13, 14. ¶ John xiv. 6.

if we are sincere and hearty in our choice, it will be a source of daily light and consolation to us. It is not indeed a smooth way that we have chosen. It is often rugged—always narrow. We may have to encounter not only the reviling and the sneer of an ungodly world, but even the suspicions of our brethren, who may not always be able to understand our motives. Yet if our heart is upright with God, we shall be ready to hazard all consequences. Our choice is made, and we are prepared to abide the cost.*

But that our choice may be daily established, let us not forget the treasury, whence life, and light, and grace, must be sought in time of need. Let us “lay the judgments of God before us.” For we have always some new lesson to learn—some new duty to perform—some new snare to avoid. We must walk therefore by rule†—as under the eye of a jealous God, who weigheth our spirits—under the eye of the ungodly, who watch for our halting—under the eye of weak Christians, who might be stumbled by our unsteady walk—under the eye of established Christians, who will be yet farther established by the testimony of our consistent profession. But for this strict and accurate walk, the promises of the word will be found all-sufficient. The obedience that is enjoined, is promised. It is the Lord “working in us”‡ that enables us to work for him, and while we are humbly depending upon his strength, and diligently improving our own, he is pledged by promise to assist;§ as we are bound by duty to obey. But in considering this verse, let each reader inquire—What choice have I made? I would remember it is for eternity. And if, through the grace that has first chosen me, I have chosen the way of truth, is the effect of this choice daily visible in a life and conversation well-ordered according to the word of God? If it is good to “hide that word in my heart,”|| as a safeguard against sin, it is good also “to lay it before” my eyes as the chart to guide my course—the model to direct my work—the support to uphold my weakness.

* Luke xiv. 23. † See Gal. vi. 16. Phil. iii. 16. ‡ Phil. ii. 12, 13. Isa. xxvi. 12. § Isaiah xli. 10. Zech. x. 12. || Verse 11.

31. I HAVE STUCK UNTO THY TESTIMONIES: O LORD, PUT ME NOT TO SHAME.

WHILE David complained of his "soul cleaving unto the dust,"* he was yet enabled to say, "I have stuck unto thy testimonies." And how exactly does this experience accord with the features of every real Christian's heart, (or two hearts, as a converted African expresses it,) described in the apostle's picture of himself—"I delight in the law of God after the inward man, but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin."†

In the midst, however, of the most painful conflicts with indwelling sin, a child of God will be enabled to hold fast his confidence. The confidence he feels of being a new creature in Jesus Christ, imboldens him to put in his claim among the family of God.

But, reader, seriously ask yourself, How did you become a Christian? Was it by birth and education, or by choice? If indeed by grace you have been enabled to "choose the way of truth," then be sure you cleave to it, so that no business, nor pleasure, nor difficulties turn you away from it. Unless indeed you "stick to" your choice, better, far better were it that you had not made it at all. "No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed. It had been better for you not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after you have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto you."‡ Yet there must be a daily conflict main-

* Verse 25.

† Rom. vii. 22, 23, 25. Most graphically is this conflict depicted in the interesting record which Augustine has given of the exercises of his own mind. "The new will which began to be in me, whereby I would love thee, O my God, the only certain sweetness, was not yet able to overcome my former will, confirmed by long continuance. So my two wills, the one old, the other new; the one carnal, the other spiritual, conflicted between themselves, and rent my soul by their disagreement. Then did I understand by my own experience what I had read, how the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit lusteth against the flesh." I was myself on both sides, but more in that which I approved, than in that which I condemned, in myself, because for the most part I suffered reluctantly, what I did willingly."—Confess. Book viii. ch. 5. Compare Rom. vii. 15—20.

‡ Luke ix. 62. John viii. 31. 2 Peter ii. 21.

tained with the world, and what is more difficult, with self, if “with purpose of heart you would cleave to the Lord.”* You will often be tempted to turn aside. The length and weariness of the way,† and the slowness of your progress, are sources of constant and harassing trial. It will be well, therefore, often to inquire, what was the reason of your original choice? Was it made under the light, direction, and encouragement of an awakened and enlightened conscience? This reason may well bind you to “stick to” it; for the more steadily you “hold fast your profession,” the greater experience you will have of its reality, the more you will be able to overcome opposing difficulties, and to assure your own heart, that the way which you have chosen, and to which “you stick,” is a “way of pleasantness and peace.”‡ Backslider! have you found God “a wilderness or a land of darkness,”§ that you could think of deserting him, and returning to the world for happiness? Is it wise to “forsake the fountain” for “broken cisterns?”|| Is it likely to make you happier in this world? And is it not certain to bring you to perdition in the next? And have you forgotten who it was that befriended you in the moment of awful extremity, and snatched you as a brand from the burning? Have you forgotten the costly proofs of his love, when he condescended to become a man, and “a man of sorrows,”¶ and to die in the agony of the cross, bearing the curse for you?*** And does not gratitude remind you, what returns of faithful service are due from a creature so infinitely indebted to him as you have been? Surely the steadfast perseverance with which his heart clave to the work that brought him down from heaven,†† may serve to put to shame the unsteadiness of your purpose in “sticking to his testimonies.” Believer! you are determined to abide by your choice. But let not your confidence be in your own strength. Remember him, who one hour declared that he would sooner die with Christ than deny him, and denied him the next hour with oaths and curses:‡‡ and learn to follow up your resolution with instant prayer—“O Lord, put me not to shame.” Leave me not to myself, lest I become a shame to myself, and an offence to thy Church. “I will keep thy statutes, O forsake me not utterly.”§§ Dependence

* Acts xi. 23. † Num. xxi. 4. ‡ Prov. iii. 17. § Jeremiah ii. 31.
 || Jeremiah ii. 13. ¶ Isaiah liii. 3. ** Gal. iii. 13. †† Compare Matt.
 xvi. 23. Luke xii. 50. Heb. xii. 2, 3. Matt. xxvi. 35, 74. §§ Verse 8.

upon the Lord, in a deep sense of our weakness is the only way of perseverance in steadfast obedience. He will never shut out the prayer of his faithful servant. He hath promised "My people shall never be ashamed:"* and, taking firm hold of his promise, you may "go on your way rejoicing."

32. I WILL RUN THE WAY OF THY COMMANDMENTS, WHEN THOU SHALT ENLARGE MY HEART.

LET us consider this determination, as the natural expression of the Christian delighting in the ways of God, and let us look for something responsive to it in our own experience. If we "have chosen the way" of God's commandments, and have been able to "stick unto" this way, we shall wish to "run in it" with constancy, activity, and cheerfulness. We shall want to mend our pace. If we walk, we shall long to run. There is always the same reason for progress that there was for setting out. Necessity, advantage, enjoyment, spurs us on to the end. Whether therefore we have made little or much progress, we shall desire to make more; we shall go on praying and walking, and praying that we may walk with a swifter motion: we shall be dissatisfied, yet not discouraged, "faint, yet pursuing."† Now this is as it should be. This is after the pattern of the holy apostle—"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do: forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."‡ But we must mark the secret as well as the pattern of Christian progress—looking beyond the Apostle, and the "so great a cloud of witnesses with which we are encompassed"—and "looking unto Jesus."§ Faith is the principle of life, and supplies the daily motion of life, by directing our eye to him as "the Author," until he "becomes the Finisher" of our faith. This is at once our duty, our privilege, our happiness, and our strength. This is the point at which we begin to run. Hitherto the shackles of sin, self-righteousness, and unbelief, had hindered us: now we "so run, that we may obtain."||

* Joel ii. 27. † Judges viii. 4. ‡ Phil. iii. 13, 14. § Heb. xii. 1, 2.
|| 1 Cor. ix. 24.

But "the way of God's commandments" is "the race set before us"—the way of love and holiness—yet a way, in which we "are sore let and hindered" by a straitened heart. And how often do we feel the heart, as it were, shut up that "it cannot get forth:"* faith so low—desires so faint—hopes so narrow, that it seems impossible to make progress. Perhaps we "did run well," and have been "hindered."† Perhaps the soul has been asleep in carelessness or self-indulgence; or unbelief in some of its varied forms has prevailed; and thus, while we "are not straitened" in God, we "are straitened in our own bowels."‡ But if the rich fool thought of enlarging his barns when his stores had increased upon him,§ should we not be sending up the petition—"O that thou wouldst bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast!"|| Whatever cause we have to cry out—"My leanness, my leanness,"¶—still, let us, in the exercise of faith and prayer, be waiting for a more cheerful ability to love, serve, and praise. Let us be restless till the prison doors are again opened, and the command is issued to the prisoners—"Go forth; and to them that are in darkness—Show yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places."*** The blessed "ways of God's commandments" lie before us, and who knoweth but the Lord will once more shine upon us, once more unloose our fetters, and renew our strength? Every motion, however, must proceed from the Lord's touch upon the heart. Our resolutions may be sincere, but without a spirit of dependence we "shall faint and be weary, and utterly fall." "I will run," saith the believer—but how? "not in my own strength, but by the good hand of my God upon me,"†† enlivening and enlarging my heart. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."‡‡ Let me begin betimes—make haste—keep straight on—fix my eye upon the mark—"endure unto the end." Surely I may hope for healing, for quickening life and power. I may yet expect "the oil of gladness" to make my chariot wheels move with ease, and in a frame of blessed surprise shall I exclaim—"Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib."§§ Godly sorrow had made me serious. Now let holy joy make me active.

* Psalm lxxxviii. 8. † Gal. v. 7. ‡ 2 Cor. vi. 12. § Luke xii. 16—19. || 1 Chron. iv. 10. ¶ Isa. xxiv. 16. *** Isa. xlix. 9. †† Ezra vii. 9. ‡‡ 2 Cor. iii. 17. §§ Can. vi. 12.

“The joy of the Lord is my strength,”* and I am ready, under the power of constraining love,† to work, to toil and to obey. I am ready to run without weariness, to “march onward” without fainting,‡ not measuring my pace by the strength which I find in myself, but looking to him who “strengtheneth with all might by his Spirit in the inner man.”§

Happy fruit of wrestling prayer and diligent waiting on God! Joy in God, and strength to walk with him, with increasing knowledge of him, increasing communion with him, and increasing confidence in him.

PART V.

33. TEACH ME, O LORD, THE WAY OF THY STATUTES, AND I SHALL KEEP IT UNTO THE END.

WHAT a high and heavenly privilege is it to be under the teaching of our gracious Lord! “Lord, to whom shall we go?”|| “Who teacheth like thee?”¶ Who can effectually teach beside thee? Have we not found, in coming to thee, that the invincible unteachableness of the dullest heart has been overcome, sight given to the blind, and understanding to the simple? Spiritual knowledge, however, will prove of little avail, unless it is employed for the purposes of practical obedience. What do we gain by the discovery even of important truth, if our own hearts and lives be not moulded into the likeness of it—if we do not feel its influence, enlightening, persuading, constraining the soul unto “the obedience of faith?” Perhaps it may be considered one of the most striking proofs of the divine origin of the “statutes” of Scripture, and of the seal of God stamped upon them, that there is no thought of our heart connected with Christian practice, that is not, in this holy book, directed to its proper end. How often do we see the most clear instructions in the regulation of our conduct, flow from single sentences or expressions in these “statutes;” evidently proving an infinite wisdom in their

* Neh. viii. 10.
Lowth's Version.

† 2 Cor. v. 44.
§ Eph. iii. 16.

‡ Isa. xl. 31. “March onward.” Bp.
|| John iv. 68. ¶ Job xxxvi. 22.

distribution, a reference in the eternal mind to every detail of practical duty, and a divine power and unction applying the word to the several circumstances of daily conduct. For, indeed, what mind but the mind of God could have comprehended, in so small a compass, such a vast system of instruction? In this view, therefore, prayers for divine teaching are intimately connected with the principle of obedience. For how can we “keep” a way which we do not understand? And who was ever taught the way of the Lord’s statutes, without marking in them a spiritual beauty and sweetness, that needed no other constraint to win and direct the heart? Walking in this path, we may derive a comfortable evidence of union with the Saviour*—“the love of God is perfected in us”†—and our confidence is established before God.‡ Yet the way is narrow, easy to mistake, and indeed impossible to find, except the Lord teach us daily by his Spirit, as well as by his word. And therefore we go on to the end with this prayer—“Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes.” But the object nearest to the believer’s heart, and that which causes many an anxious, and too often many an unbelieving thought, is perseverance unto the end. He is not satisfied with transient emotions of love, or a short-lived course of sincerity. The burden of his prayer is, that his walk may be steady—uniform—“unto the end;” always intent upon the mark. And this crowning blessing is secured by the promise of divine teaching,§ and seals to him the hope of victory over his spiritual enemies, and the participation of the Saviour’s glory.|| Confidence, however, without prayer, is most daring presumption; but when an assurance of “keeping the way to the end” is preceded by continual supplications for divine teaching, then we may consider it as the holy grace of perseverance. Peter indeed vehemently protested, but Peter forgot to pray, and therefore he fell. What a mercy to be interested in that covenant, which engages for the continuance of believers in this “way of God’s statutes!” “I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me. I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” ¶

* John iii. 24. † 1 John ii. 5. ‡ 1 John iii. 22. § 1 John ii. 27. || Rev. ii. 26—28. ¶ Jer. xxxii. 40; xxxi. 33.

34. GIVE ME UNDERSTANDING, AND I SHALL KEEP THY LAW ;
YEA, I SHALL OBSERVE IT WITH MY WHOLE HEART.

‘HE that is his own teacher,’ says Bernard, ‘has a fool for his master.’ Man cannot teach what he does not know; and of God and of his law he knows nothing. Therefore the beginning of wisdom is a consciousness of ignorance, a distrust of our own understanding, and a desire to be taught of God—“Give me understanding.” This spiritual understanding is the gift of Jesus Christ.* The Saviour directs us to himself as the fountain from whence it flows—“I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”† And this understanding differs from mere intellectual discernment or speculative knowledge, as being an influential principle, and the spring of spiritual activity in our walk with God;‡ so that our obedience is not merely outward and reluctant, but the actings of filial delight and wholeness of heart—not only looking to keep the law of God to the end, during our whole life, but every day of our life “*with our whole heart.*” Have we made the blessed choice of a soul that is still restless in seeking more love to God, and greater alacrity in his service? Do we long to engage our hearts with more entire devotedness to the work of obedience? Then such a prayer as this will be suitable as the expression of our need, and as the utterance of an humble, resolute petitioner. It is not enough that we have once received, unless we are constantly receiving. We must ask, that we may receive, but after we have received we must ask again. Still, however, such a prayer as this is never offered up until the soul has in part received what it is here seeking for. The natural man is more or less “wise in his own conceit,” and has therefore no idea of his need of divine teaching. But even a clear apprehension of the doctrines of the Bible, and of the “truth as it is in Jesus,” will not satisfy the real believer. “Give me understanding”—is still the prayer of the most advanced proficient in the ways of God, not only that I may believe these doctrines, but that I may adorn them. And in every occasion of need, in every path of duty, this cry is repeated, with an importunity that is never wearisome to the ears of our gracious Father. And in how many unnoticed instances has the an-

* 1 John ii. 20; v. 20.

† John viii. 12; also xii. 46.

‡ See Col. i. 9, 10.

swer been vouchsafed, when some clear and heavenly ray darting unexpectedly into the mind, or some providential concurrence of unforeseen circumstances, has disentangled a path, before intricate and involved, and marked it before us with the light of a sunbeam. How many whispers of conscience—how many seasonable suggestions in moments of darkness and perplexity may the observant child of God record, as the answer to this needful prayer—"Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord."* And thus it is, that our growth in spiritual understanding will evidence itself in the steady consistency of a well-ordered conversation—"Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge among you? Let him show, out of a good conversation, his works with meekness of wisdom."† If our understanding is found conducive to our holiness and happiness in the ways of God, we cannot doubt that it cometh from him "who giveth liberally and upbraideth not."‡

35. MAKE ME TO GO IN THE PATH OF THY COMMANDMENTS; FOR THEREIN DO I DELIGHT.

EQUALLY ignorant are we of the path of God's commandments, and impotent to walk in it. "The *light of life*"§ is therefore promised, at once to "give us understanding," and to "make us to go in the path." Blindness is to be removed, light poured in, and quickening life to walk in the light. Thus "all is of God," who "openeth the eyes of the blind," and "worketh in us to will and to do of his good pleasure."|| Is there any natural inclination towards this path? Far from it. "The carnal mind is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."¶ There must be therefore some new bias, some constraining principle introduced. There must be an act of the power of God—"Turn thou me, and I shall be turned."** "Make me to go in the path of thy commandments." If ever we have, through a spiritual acquaintance with this path, found some delight in it, still we want accelerated motion to run with increasing alacrity. We want to take "the Lord God for our strength, and he shall make our feet like hind's feet,

* Psalm cvii. 43. † James iii. 13. ‡ James i. 5. § John viii. 12. || Phil. ii. 13. ¶ Rom. viii. 7. ** Jer. xxxi. 13.

and shall make us to walk upon our high places.”* Sometimes the path may appear uninviting, when seen with the eye of sense, rather than with the eye of faith. Through this distorted vision all its difficulties are brought into full view, while all its counterbalancing enjoyments are hid. Let us, however, exercise that “faith which is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”† Let us exhibit our proper character, “walking by faith, and not by sight,”‡ and our discernment of unseen things will be more clear, and our enjoyment of them more permanent. The prayer will then be with increasing earnestness of desire—“Make me to go in the path of thy commandments.”

But we must not be content with walking in this way; we must seek to “delight in it.” Delight is the marrow of religion. “God loveth a cheerful giver,”§ and accepts obedience only when it is given, not when it is forced. He loves the service of that man, who considers it his highest privilege and pleasure to render it, and whose heart rejoices in the way, “as a giant to run his race.”|| Fervent prayer and cheerful obedience, mark the experience of the thriving Christian. As a true “child of Zion, he is joyful in his King:”¶ he loves his service, and counts it “perfect freedom,” the dominion of love, mercy, and grace. But what does the poor, weak, self-condemned penitent say to this description of a child of God? He is distressed by it, and because he thinks he cannot find the same marks in himself, he concludes that he does not belong to the heavenly family, not considering that his very grief is caused by his love to, and delight in, that way in which he is so hindered, and in which he daily prays—“Make me to go.” It was probably the same sense of weakness and inability “to go in the path of God’s commandments,” which urged David’s prayer, and if it urges yours, poor, trembling penitent, if it sends you to a throne of grace, you will, ere long, receive an answer of peace, and “go on your way rejoicing.”

If, then, each of us can say of this path—“therein do I delight”—we are not only following the “man after God’s own heart,” but we bear the image of David’s Lord, and our forerunner in this path. He could testify to his Fa-

* Hab. iii. 19. † Heb. xi. 1. ‡ 2 Cor. v. 7. § 2 Cor. ix. 7. || Psalm xix. 5. ¶ Psalm cxlix. 2.

ther—"I delight to do thy will, O my God,"* and to his disciples—"I have meat to eat that ye know not of. My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work:"† and as a proof of the intenseness of his joy, he could, to their great amazement, "go before them"‡ to Jerusalem, unappalled by the "baptism"§ of blood which awaited him, yea, even "straitened" with the unquenchable ardour of his love, "until it was accomplished."

36. INCLINE MY HEART UNTO THY TESTIMONIES, AND NOT TO COVETOUSNESS.

BUT what is that power of God which we just now conceived to be necessary to "make us to go in the path of his commandments?" No other force is employed than that of love. He touches our hearts by his Spirit, and inclines them to himself. It is the bowing and bending of the will to follow the gracious touch of the Spirit, by which the Lord effectually inclines and draws us. Thus "the day of his power," in which he "makes us willing,"|| is "a time of love."¶ "I drew them," saith he, "with cords of a man, with bands of love."** And when it is remembered that our hearts are not only naturally indisposed to this way of God, but that there is a strong counteracting bias in the soul, the need, and force of such a prayer as this—"Incline my heart"—will be deeply felt. The contrary bias within, opposing the workings of the renewed man, is covetousness—a principle or habit, that assumes a thousand shapes and forms of gratifying self at the expense of love to God. Few but are ready to decry and condemn it in others, while perhaps it may be cleaving to themselves as their besetting sin. When the mind is suffered to grasp after the world, as if we were seeking our whole portion in it, we have the greatest reason to "take heed" to our Lord's admonition, and "beware of covetousness."†† When we invest earthly gratifications with any inherent excellency, we put them in the place of God, and (for the time at least) are under the influence of covetousness. If, then, in our intercourse with the world, we feel an undue balance to our own interest, oh! let us seek that the bent of our heart may be "inclined unto the testimonies of our God."

* Psalm xl. 8, with Heb. x. 7. † John iv. 32, 34. ‡ Mark x. 32. § Luke xii. 50. || Psalm cx. 3. ¶ Ezek. xvi. 8. ** Hosea xi. 4. †† Luke xii. 15.

And if our natural inclination is to covetousness, let us not forget to inquire how far it is subdued in us? Are we willing to part with our substance at the Lord's will?—not only with our superfluities, or the refuse of what we possess, but with that which seems to be necessary to us? Do we desire to sit loose to our earthly comforts, and to restrain that “inordinate concupiscence within,” which in the sight of God is “idolatry?”* Does covetousness never show itself in discontent with the Lord's dealings with us, and an eagerness to “seek great things for ourselves,” when he hath said, “Seek them not?”† That which the world call a generous, liberal, noble spirit, may consist with much of a covetous principle. For covetousness will part with much, if but the darling object, the idol, is retained. But how shall we discern the answer to this prayer? We may be encouraged to hope that an answer is given, when our carnal desires have less ascendancy; when we are enabled to deny the motions of this besetting sin, and to act in opposition to it; when our temperance of mind in earthly things is increased, and our “affection” more steadily “set on things above.” There is probably no propensity of the heart, that offers more powerful resistance to the influence of the gospel. How much of the good seed of the kingdom that was springing up with the promise of a plentiful harvest, has this weed of rank luxuriance “choked, that it has become unfruitful!”‡ But we must not expect to have our prayers for the deliverance from this destructive principle answered, without an earnest and sincere determination in the Lord's strength to mortify it. Let us seek to “incline our hearts to the testimonies of God,” exercising “the life of faith” in daily dependence on the Lord for the provisions of this world, and for a realizing apprehension of the glories of eternity. Earthly cares will then be cast upon God,§ and earthly prospects will lose their lustre.|| But let us not forget that the desire, the inclination, the principle of covetousness, even if it is not brought into active and perceptible motion, is destructive of the life of religion, and

* Col. iii. 5. Comp. Eph. v. 5. Job xxxi. 24. † Jer. xlv. 24.

‡ Mark iv. 19.—The example of the rich young man, Matt. xix. 21, 22. Ananias and Sapphira, Acts v. 1, 2. Demas, 2 Tim. iv. 10.

§ See Heb. xiii. 5, also Matt. vi. 25—33.

|| Luke xii. 16. “A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth”—illustrated by the parable, verse 16—21.

unless subdued by grace, is most fatal in its effects—"They that *will be rich*,* fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition." Awful warning to professors! "The love of money is the root of all evil; which while some have coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."† A most important exhortation to the people of God! "but thou, O man of God, flee these things, and follow after righteousness."‡ If the Lord loves you, he will not indeed lose you; but, unless you "take heed and beware of covetousness," he will not spare you. In the midst therefore of temptation without, and a world of sin within, go on your pilgrimage to heaven, with this prayer indelibly fixed on your heart—"Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness."

37. TURN AWAY MINE EYES FROM BEHOLDING VANITY; AND
QUICKEN THOU ME IN THY WAY.

How hard, nay, how impossible it is, without the continued exercise of watchfulness and prayer, to detain the heart in the service and the ways of God! Naturally inclined to evil, and hankering after forbidden paths, a thousand vanities steal it away in a moment, and every object around furnishes fuel for temptation. What need have we to cry to God our Saviour all the way to heaven—"Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity." Vanity is sin, because it "is not of the Father, but of the world,"§ and it includes "all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." Detail is unnecessary in reckoning all the sum of vanity, or in enlarging on any particular items. The preacher, the son of David, has done it for us; standing on the vantage ground, and taking within his view the farthest horizon of earthly excellency, he pronounces his judgment—"Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, vanity of vanities: all is vanity."|| That many a promising profession has been blasted by the

* Οι βουλομενοι πλουτειν, 1 Tim. vi. 9. The very desire or inclination to be rich bears the stamp of a heart seeking to divide its services between God and Mammon, and therefore unfaithful to him who by just right claims the supreme—undisputed whole—"My son, give me thine heart."

† 1 Tim. vi. 10. ‡ Ibid. vi. 11. § 1 John ii. 16. || Eccl. i. 2; also ii. 1—12.

“choking lusts of other things,” we have just had occasion to mention; and that many a sincere profession has been exposed to hurt by the same deadly influence, is evident from the solemn caution given to the disciples of Christ—“Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of life, and so that day come upon you unawares.”* There are, indeed, some who seem to walk as if they were proof against temptation. We see them venturing to the very edge of the precipice, under a vain assurance that no danger is to be apprehended. But such confidence as this is upon the brink of a grievous fall.† ‘The tender-hearted child of God, like David, while he trusts in the promise, that “Sin shall not have dominion over him,”‡ knows that he can only enjoy the comfort of it, or live in the assurance of it, while he is shrinking from every thing that is likely to hurt and endanger him. He “hates even the garment spotted by the flesh,”§ and remembering how often his outward senses have ministered to the workings of his weak and treacherous heart,|| he prays with fervency and with perseverance—“Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity.” Probably David might feel that he had especial need for this prayer, from the recollection of the circumstances of his own sin.¶ Yet none that know that they carry about with them a lusting heart, will find this prayer unsuitable to their circumstances of daily temptation. But we must watch as well as pray. For as watchfulness without prayer is presumption, so prayer without watchfulness is self-delusion. To pray that our eyes may be “turned from vanity,” without “making a covenant with our eyes,”** that they should not behold it, is like “taking fire in our bosoms,” and expecting “not to be burnt,”†† because we have prayed that we might not be burnt. If we desire not to be “led into temptation,” we must “watch that we enter not into it.”‡‡ Unless we wish to be ensnared, we must keep at a proper distance from the danger. If we pray for safety—“Lead us not into temptation,” we must avoid the circumstances and occasions of temptation; thus showing the sincerity of our prayer by the watchfulness of our conduct. And thus, if we are really

* Luke xxi. 34. † Prov. xvi. 18. ‡ Rom. vi. 14. § Jude 23. || See Num. xv. 39. Jos. vii. 21. ¶ 2 Sam. xi. 2. ** Job xxxi. 1. †† Prov. vi. 27, 28. ‡‡ Compare Matt. vi. 10, with xxvi. 41.

afraid of sin, we shall be equally afraid of temptation to sin. "The knife will be put to the throat if we be given to appetite."* "We shall be afraid of the wine when sparkling in the glass."† Who has not found the eye an inlet to sin? When Eve beheld the forbidden fruit, perhaps she did not think of taking it; and when she took it, did not think of eating it: but "the beginning of" sin "is as the letting out of water," whose progress once opened may beat down all before it.‡ When Bunyan's pilgrims were obliged to pass through Vanity Fair, assailed by temptations and allurements on every side, they stopped their eyes and ears, and quickening their pace, cried, "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity." A striking reproof to us, who too often loiter and gaze, until we begin to covet those vanities to which, as Christians, we "are dead."§ But, that we may offer effectual resistance in the moment of danger, let us be constant in seeking at once the preventing grace of God to turn away our eyes and heart from temptation, and his quickening grace to urge us forward in a more steady, active, habitual progress, in the way to heaven. Let the eye and the heart be kept looking towards Canaan, and the world, with all its flowery paths of vanity, will appear a dreary wilderness, and Christ and heaven the only objects of desire. "He that shutteth his eyes from seeing evil, he shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munition of rocks: bread shall be given him, his water shall be sure."|| Precious promise to those that flee from temptation!

38. STABLISH THY WORD UNTO THY SERVANT, WHO IS DEVOTED TO THY FEAR.

IF "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,"¶ a "treasure,"*** a "strong confidence,"†† and "a fountain of life;"‡‡ how wise, how rich, how safe, how happy is he that "is devoted to" it. Blessed indeed is he with every spiritual blessing—with the favour of his God,§§ the secret manifestations of his love,||| the teaching of his grace,¶¶ and the mercy of his covenant.*** The principle, so far

* Prov. xxiii. 1. † Verses 31, 32. ‡ Gen. iii. 6, with Prov. xvii. 14.
§ See Col. iii. 2, 3. || Isa. xxxiii. 15, 16. ¶ Ps. cxi. 10. ** Isa. xxxiii. 6.
†† Prov. xiv. 26. ‡‡ Prov. xiv. 27. §§ Ps. xxxiii. 18. ||| Ps. xxv. 14.
¶¶ Ps. xxv. 12. *** Ps. ciii. 17.

from being the spirit of bondage, flows into the heart from a sense of forgiveness—"There is forgiveness with thee, that *thou mayest be feared*."* It is also invigorated by an interest in gospel privileges; for "receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved," we are exhorted to seek for "grace whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and *godly fear*."† It also completes the character of a "servant of God, devoted to his fear" in an obedience of choice, of reverence, and of love; "joining himself to the Lord to serve him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be his servant."‡ Yes, gracious Lord, I had rather be bound than loosed. I only wish to be loosed from the bonds of sin, that I might be bound to thy service for ever. My heart is treacherous, and I care not what bonds are laid on me. "O Lord, truly I am thy servant, thou hast loosed my bonds;"§ I am "devoted to thy fear." Is this my desire, my mind, my determination, my character? Then let me come and plead my title to an interest in the promises of the word—rich and free, "exceeding great and precious"||—all mine—"yea, and amen in Christ Jesus:"¶ let me come and plead at the throne of grace, that every word may be "stablished" in my victory over sin, advancing knowledge of Christ, experience of his love, conformity to his image, and finally in my preservation in him unto eternal life. But I must inquire, how far has the fear of God operated with me as a safeguard from sin,** and an habitual rule of conduct?†† I observe that David's confidence in the promises of God, far from lessening his jealousy over himself, only made him more "devoted to the fear" of God. And if my assurance be well grounded, it will be ever accompanied with holy fear; so that my progress may be known by my "standing more in awe of God's word;"‡‡ having a more steady abhorrence of sin, and a dread of "grieving the Holy Spirit of God." Thus this filial fear produces a holy confidence, while confidence serves to strengthen fear, and their mutual influence quickens our devotedness to the work of the Lord. How interesting is it to remark that the gospel privilege of assurance is not confined to the New Testament dispensation. It was

* Ps. cxxx. 4. Compare Jer. xxxiii. 8, 9. Hos. iii. 5. † Heb. xii. 28. ‡ Isa. lvi. § Psalm cxvi. 16. || 2 Pet. i. 4. ¶ 2 Cor. i. 20. ** Gen. xxxix. 9. Neh. v. 15. Prov. xvi. 6. †† Prov. xxiii. 17. ‡‡ Verse 161.

evidently enjoyed by the ancient saints of God.* David is here seeking it, when he pleads, “Stablish thy word unto thy servant.” The direct act of faith—the faith of affiancing, as it regards God in Christ, his engagements, and his promises, cannot be too confident. The reflex act of faith—the faith of assurance, marking our conformity to the character to whom the promise belongs, and our consequent interest in it, may possibly in some cases be too strong. But certainly in proportion as our interest in the great salvation is assured to us, will be the exercise of our faith in pleading our interest in the several promises included in it. The promises are made to the whole church, that each of us might look for our part and interest in them. And much of the power and comfort of faith is realized in the personal application of these promises to our individual cases, and bringing them before the throne of grace as the subject matter and arguments of our pleading. The plea here employed is such as is familiar in the exercises of the believer’s experience—“Stablish thy word unto *thy servant*.” Thou hast bought me with a precious price; thou hast made me thine: thou hast subdued my heart to thyself, so that it is now “devoted to thy fear.” Whatsoever, therefore, thy covenant has provided for my sanctification, my humiliation, my chastisement, my present and everlasting consolation—“Stablish this word;” let it be fulfilled in me, for I am “thy servant, devoted to thy fear.”

39. TURN AWAY MY REPROACH WHICH I FEAR; FOR THY JUDGMENTS ARE GOOD.

THERE is reproach that we have no cause to fear, but rather to glory in; that which is stamped by our Lord as one of the chief privileges of his gospel,† and which his faithful people have ever borne as the badge of their profession,‡ and have ever found a ground of rejoicing.§ But there was a reproach that David had cause to dread, and the removal of which was with him the subject of the deepest anxiety, and most importunate prayer—“By this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the

* Mark this petition drawn out by David into a full pleading with his God. 2 Sam. vii. 25, 28, 29. The expression also of the same confidence will afterwards be noticed, verse 49.

† Matt. v. 10—12. Comp. Phil. i. 29. ‡ Acts xxiv. 5; xxviii. 22. Heb. xiii. 13. § Acts v. 31. 1 Peter iv. 12—16.

Lord to blaspheme.”* The reproach that is brought upon the Saviour’s name by the unsteadiness of a Christian profession is much indeed to be “feared” by the most established believer, and will be doubtless overruled for the habitual dependence of his soul upon an almighty upholding power. “Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe,”† will be the constant supplication of one that fears the Lord, and fears himself. We do not perhaps sufficiently consider that the enemies of the gospel are ever “watching for our halting,”‡ else, why among many professors this remissness in removing all occasions of reproach on account of inconsistency of temper, conversation, or any thing that may be unbecoming the follower of Jesus? None therefore that feel their own weakness, the continual apprehension of danger, the tendency of their heart to backslide from God, and to disgrace “that worthy name by which they are called,”§ will think this prayer unseasonable or unnecessary—“Turn away my reproach which I fear.” Perhaps also those who have been exposed in spiritual conflicts, to “the fiery darts of the wicked one,” may find this a suitable prayer in such seasons of trial. Sometimes when Satan has succeeded in beguiling a child of God—when he has drawn him into some worldly compliance or weakened his confidence, by tempting him to look to himself for some warrant of acceptance, (in all which suggestions he is aided and abetted by his treacherous heart,) this “accuser of the brethren” will then turn back upon him, and, changing himself into “an angel of light,” reproach him with those very falls, into which he had successfully led him; so that frequently a long and black catalogue is presented to the harassed soul with a view of adding to his distress. Bunyan does not fail to enumerate these reproaches as amongst the most harassing assaults of Apollyon. In his desperate conflict with Christian, he taunts him with his fall into the Slough of Despond, and every successive deviation from his path, as blotting out his war-

* 2 Sam. xii. 14. The same deprecation of “reproach,” appears to have been strongly felt by Saul—“I have sinned; *yet honour me now*, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel.” (1 Sam. xv. 30.) But how different the principle in these two instances under a similar trial. The one tremblingly alive, that the name of God might not be reproached through his shameful fall. The other earnest only to secure his own reputation.

† Verse 117. ‡ Jer. xx. 10. § James ii. 7.

rant of present favour with the king, and blasting all hopes of reaching the celestial city. Christian is neither able nor willing to conceal or palliate the charge. He knows it is all true, and much more besides; but he knows this is true also—"Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin."* Christian! are you harassed with these fiery darts? Remember the direction, the only direction, that meets your case, and provides for your help—"Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked."† If you are conscious of hating the sins with which you have been overtaken, and of earnestly longing for deliverance from their power, —while the recollections of their guilt and defilement humble you before the Lord, you have only to take fresh hold of the gospel, and you shall "overcome by the blood of the Lamb."‡ Victory must come from the cross. And the soul that is directing its eye thither for pardon, strength, and consolation, may sigh out the prayer with acceptance—"Turn away my reproach which I fear." Yet we must not forget how deeply the guilt of apostacy or backsliding is aggravated by the acknowledgment that all are constrained to make—"Thy judgments are good." How affecting is the Lord's expostulation with us!—"What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain? O my people, what have I done unto thee, and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me. I have not caused thee to serve with an offering, nor wearied thee with incense."§ We have nothing to complain of our Master, of his work, or of his wages; but much, very much to complain of ourselves, of our unwatchfulness, neglect, backsliding, and consequent reproach upon our profession.

But whatever allowed backsliding, or inconsistency, may at any time bring us the "reproach which we fear," let us cry with unceasing supplication, for the Lord's sake, for the Church's sake, that it may be "turned away from us." Meanwhile, "we may accept it as the punishment of our iniquity,"|| and in the recollection of the "goodness of the Lord's judgments," we may still venture to hope and look

* Rom. v. 20. 1 John i. 7. † Eph. vi. 16. ‡ Rev. xii. 9—11. § Jer. ii. 5. Mic. vi. 3. Isa. xliii. 23. || Lev. xxvi. 41.

for the best things to come out of it, from our good and gracious Lord.

40. BEHOLD, I HAVE LONGED AFTER THY PRECEPTS: QUICKEN ME IN THY RIGHTEOUSNESS.

WE are sometimes unconsciously led to “long” after the promises, more than “after the precepts” of God; forgetting that it is our privilege and safety to have an equal regard to both—to obey his precepts in dependence on his promises, and to expect the accomplishment of the promises, in the way of obedience to the precepts. If the mere professor is enabled to walk in outward conformity to the Lord’s precepts, it is the utmost extent of his service, and he feels it to be a heavy yoke. He knows nothing of the believer’s inward delight and longing after them. Of many of them he says in his heart—“This is a hard saying: who can hear it?”* But is there not a reason for the believer’s delight even in most difficult and painful precepts? Are not the moments of his deepest repentance his times of the sweetest “refreshing from the presence of the Lord?”† Whatever pleasure there may be in the indulgence of a sinful inclination, we cannot doubt that the ultimate enjoyment from the mortification of it is far more abundant.‡ What more fruitful source of comfort is found, than obedience to our Saviour’s precept—“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.”§ For this is our Lord’s way of restraining the power of sin, and humbling the pride of the heart; and by this wholesome discipline our real happiness is fixed upon a solid and permanent basis. So that whatever dispensation some might be disposed to desire for breaking the precept without forfeiting the promise, the believer blesses God for the strictness that binds him to a steady obedience to his will. To him it is grievous, not to keep it, but to break it. Wherever, therefore, we can discover a

* John vi. 60.

† Acts iii. 19. Luther says, the practice of repentance was ever sweeter to him, after hearing the expression of an old divine—‘That is kind repentance, which begins from the love of God.’

‡ See David’s lively expression of gratitude—first to his God—and then to the instrument employed by him (Abigail)—in restraining him from the gratification of most unjustifiable revenge.—1 Sam. xxv. 32, 33.

§ Luke ix. 23.

longing after the precepts, we see an evidence of a child of God. Much indeed of Christian experience consists in desire; and the health of the soul may chiefly be ascertained by the pulse of its desires. There are indeed times when the violence of temptation, or the paralyzing effect of lifeless frames, renders us unable to trace the desires of the "hidden man of the heart:" and yet even in these gloomy hours, when the mouth is shut and the heart dumb before God—there may be an incense ascending out of that heart before the throne of grace, when it is "so troubled that it cannot speak."* We have a powerful Intercessor "helping our infirmities"—interpreting our desires, and crying from within, "with groanings that cannot be uttered."† Such desires, such cries, indited by our Advocate within, and presented by our Advocate above,‡ are most consoling earnestnesses of their fulfilment. "He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry and will save them."§ Let the child of God then be encouraged to besiege the mercy-seat with incessant importunity,|| and if he cannot conceal from himself the coldness and weakness of his spiritual desires, at least let him not be content with idle confessions and heartless complainings. Let him bewail his own deadness before God. Let him wrestle with God for a real desire—a longing desire. "Quicken me in thy righteousness." I plead thy righteousness—thy righteous promise for the reviving of my spiritual life. I long for more lively apprehensions of thy spotless righteousness. Oh! let me be invigorated by it in my delight, my obedience, my secret communion, my Christian walk and conversation. Such longings poured out before the Lord, and accompanied with humble and earnest supplications for a fresh supply of quickening grace, are far different from "the desire of the slothful, which killeth him,"¶ and will not be forgotten before God. "Delight thyself in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart."** O for a more enlarged desire, and for a more abundant supply!

But it may be asked, what weariness in, and reluctancy to duties, is consistent with the principle and exercise of grace? Where it is only in the members, not in the mind?††

* Psalm lxxvii. 4. † Rom. viii. 26. ‡ Heb. ix. 24. Rev. viii. 3, 4.

§ Psalm cxlv. 18. || Matt. xi. 12. ¶ Prov. xxi. 35. ** Psalm xxxvii. 4.

†† See Rom. vii. 23.

—where it is only partial, not prevalent—where it is only occasional, not habitual—where it is lamented and resisted, and not allowed—and where, in spite of its influence, the Christian still holds on the way of duty—grace reigns in the midst of conflict, and will ultimately and gloriously triumph over all hinderance and opposition. But in the midst of the humbling views of sin that present themselves on every side, let me inquire—Have I an habitual “hungering and thirsting after righteousness?” Let me search diligently into the matter, and since, as at the best, I do but get my desires increased, and not satisfied, let heaven be much in my heart, where alone I shall be fully satisfied. “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake with thy likeness.”*

PART VI.

41. LET THY MERCIES COME ALSO UNTO ME, O LORD; EVEN THY SALVATION, ACCORDING TO THY WORD.

A PRAYER at all times suitable for a sinner, who needs mercy every moment, and has been taught to look for it only in the Lord’s “salvation.” Out of Christ we know only a God of justice and holiness. In Christ he is revealed as “a just God, and yet a Saviour;”† and in “his salvation, which is nigh them that fear him, mercy and truth are met together: righteousness and peace have kissed each other.”‡ Therefore general notions of the mercy of God without a distinct apprehension of his “salvation,” can never be a warrant of faith to a sinner; can never have any other origin than in presumption, such as God abhors. Can there be any communication of mercy from an unknown God? Can there be any intercourse with an angry God? “Acquaint thyself now with him, and be at peace, thereby good shall come unto thee”§—“the Lord’s mercies, even his salvation.” This prayer, however, may be considered as peculiarly suitable for one, who “has tasted that the Lord is gracious;” and who longs to live under the realizing sense

* Psalm xvii. 15. † Isa. xlv. 21. ‡ Psalm lxxv. 9, 10. Compare Rom. iii. 26. § Job xxii. 21.

of his mercies. There are seasons with the believer, when, through manifold temptations, he is unable to taste God's mercies, or to realize his enjoyment of God's salvation. Then the desire of his heart is, to seek a personal and individual interest in it. "Let thy mercies come *also unto me.*" The experience of the Lord's people furnishes a powerful plea in prayer—"Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto them that love thy name. Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest to thy people; O visit me with thy salvation, that I may see the felicity of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance."* Are we seeking the assurance of this salvation in prayer? Are we waiting for the present power of it, saving us from sin, Satan, the world, ourselves, and "blessing us with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus?" If faith and patience should be put to the trial in the exercise of waiting, yet in the end we shall doubtless find, that God, by these dispensations with us, has been secretly storing us with experience, which will be a rich treasury to us throughout our pilgrimage. That he has kept us from turning our backs upon his ways, when we had no comfort in them, that he has upheld us with secret supplies of strength—what is this but the working of his own Spirit within, and the pledge that the work shall advance to perfection? That he has enabled us, against all discouragements, to "continue instant in prayer," is surely an answer to that prayer, which, in our apprehensions of it, had been cast out. That in the exercise of waiting upon him, we have been restless in the possession of worldly consolation, is an assurance that the Lord himself will be our soul-satisfying and eternal portion. And who is there now in the sensible enjoyment of his love, who does not bless that divine wisdom which took the same course with them that has been taken with us to bring them to these joys? When did a weeping seed-time fail of bringing a joyful harvest?† But let not the word of promise be forgotten—"According to thy word," that it shall come fully, freely, eternally to him that waiteth for it. "Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness; those that remember thee in thy ways."‡ The same frame of experience will again come before us—"My soul fainteth for

* Verse 132. Psalm cvi. 4, 5. † Psalm cxxvi. 5, 6. ‡ Isaiah lxiv. 5.

thy salvation, but I hope in thy word.”* Many there are, indeed, who are satisfied with attainments far too low in spiritual enjoyments. It is comfortless to live at a distance from our Father’s house, when we might be dwelling in the secret of his presence, and rejoicing in the smiles of his love. But sometimes, alas! days, weeks, and even months, pass by without any painful exercises of soul as to the reasons of this deprivation. Yet let us not charge this dull and dishonourable frame upon the sovereignty of the Divine dispensations. Let us rather trace it to its true source—want of desire—want of faith—want of prayer—want of diligence. Let us be excited to a sense of our need of Divine influence. Let us be encouraged by the recollection, that earnest prayer will bring a sure answer; if not in the immediate fulfilment of our desires, at least in the enlargement of them. And how can our desires be too large after the mercies of God’s salvation?

42. SO SHALL I HAVE WHEREWITH TO ANSWER HIM THAT
REPROACHETH ME; FOR I TRUST IN THY WORD.

WHAT is the salvation which he had just been speaking of? The whole gift of the mercy of God—redemption from sin, death, and hell—pardon, peace, and acceptance with a reconciled God—constant communication of spiritual blessings—all that God can give or we can want—all that we are able to receive here, or heaven can perfect hereafter. Now if this “comes to us”—come to our hearts—surely it will furnish us at all times with “an answer to him that reproacheth us.” Do the world cast upon us the reproach of the cross? We find it our happiness not to live without the cross; and we can testify that there are no comforts like Christ’s comforts, even in the midst of tribulation. And yet, when Satan’s temptations or the reproaches of the ungodly assault the soul suffering from a sense of spiritual desertion, the trial is very severe, and the believer, having no sensible strength to support him, is sometimes unable to exercise faith in him “that hideth himself;”† and therefore is unprepared with an “answer to him that reproacheth him.” Such appeared to be Job’s condition,‡ and Heman’s,§ and that of many of the Lord’s most favoured people, at different stages of their experience. And

* Verse 81. † Isa. xlv. 15. ‡ Job vi. vii. ix. § Psalm lxxxviii.

how should this teach us to pray for a realizing sense of the Lord's "mercies, even of his salvation," not only as necessary to our peace and comfort, but as furnishing a powerful and sufficient "answer to him that reproacheth." When we have a personal interest in it, and in him who is the All in All of it, we "have the witness in ourselves."* We are garrisoned against every assault from without, and shall be enabled to say, "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me."† Such was the "answer" that David gave "to him that reproached." Probably the divisions in his family were a frequent occasion of reproach, but his confession was ready—"Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; for this is all my salvation and all my desire."‡ This assurance is the confidence of faith. "I trust in thy word," "not one jot or tittle of which can ever fall to the ground:" and in this confidence, upon the conviction of an enlightened judgment, we may "be ready always to give an answer to every one that asketh us a reason of the hope that is in us, with meekness and fear."§ "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper, and every tongue that riseth against thee in judgment, thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord."||

Oh! do not we often fail in gospel boldness by the weakness of our apprehensions of the gospel salvation? Clear and full evangelical views are indispensable to the enlivening exercises of our Christian obligations. Any indistinctness here, from its necessary mixture of self-righteousness and unbelief, obscures the warrant of our personal interest, and therefore hinders our firm grasp of the promises—by which alone we can hope to receive the needful supplies of Divine strength. Much cause therefore have we to pray for a spiritual perception of the gospel in its freeness and fulness, in its beauty and loveliness, as well as in its holy and heavenly enjoyments. Much need have we to use our speedy diligence, without delay—our painful diligence, without indulgence—our continual diligence, without weariness—that we be not satisfied with remaining on the skirts

* 1 John v. 10. † Micah vii. 8. ‡ 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. § 1 Peter iii. 15.
|| Isa. liv. 17.

of the kingdom; that it be not a matter of doubt whether we belong to it or not; but, that grace being added to grace, “so an entrance may be ministered unto us abundantly into”* all its rich consolations and everlasting joys.

43. AND TAKE NOT THE WORD OF TRUTH UTTERLY OUT OF MY MOUTH; FOR I HAVE HOPED IN THY JUDGMENTS.

FOR the sake of the Church and the world, no less than for our own sakes, let us give diligence to clear up our interest in the Gospel, that “the joy of the Lord may be our strength” in his service. The want of personal assurance is not only a loss in our own individual experience, but a hinderance to usefulness within our appointed sphere. From this cause, our efforts are often powerless, in parrying off the attack of “him that reproaches us:” and our attempts to “strengthen the weak hands and confirm the feeble knees”† of our brethren unavailing. At some times in this state of perplexity we are afraid to speak for the Saviour, lest we should incur the charge of hypocrisy. At other times we are ashamed to speak, from the absence of that only constraining principle, a sense of “the love of God upon the soul.” And thus “the word of truth is taken out of our mouths.” Many are the times with some of us, when we have wanted a word to speak for the relief of the Lord’s tempted people, and have not been able to find it; and when the recollection of precious lost opportunities may well give utterance to the prayer—“Take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth.” Not only take it not out of my heart, but let it be ready in my mouth for a confession of my Master. Some of us have often known the painful trial of allowing worldly habits and conversation to take their course, when a want of liberty of spirit has hindered us from standing up boldly for our God. Some of us may allege the plea of bashfulness or judicious caution in excuse for silence; which, however, in many instances, we fear, must be regarded as a self-deceptive covering for the real cause of restraint—the want of apprehension of the mercy of God to the soul. “All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord, and *thy saints shall bless thee*. They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power:

* 2 Peter i, 5—11. † Isa. xxxv. 3.

to make known to the sons of men his mighty acts and the glorious majesty of his kingdom.”* We are aware indeed that wisdom is required to know when to speak as well as what to speak. “There is a time to keep silence as well as a time to speak,”† and “the prudent shall keep silence in that time.”‡ But it will be always well to examine whether it is our cross to be “dumb with silence”—whether when we “hold our peace even from good, our sorrow is stirred,” and our “heart hot within us, and the fire burning.”§ Oh! let “not the word of truth be taken *utterly* out of our mouth.” If we cannot say all we want of our Saviour, let us say all we can. A word spoken in weakness may be a word of Almighty power, and a present help to one of the Lord’s little ones. And in our connexions with the world, many occasions will unexpectedly offer, when the heart is wakeful and active to improve them. The common topics of earthly conversation may furnish a channel for heavenly intercourse, so that our communication even with the world may be like Jacob’s ladder, whose bottom rested upon the earth, and the top of it reached heaven.|| And oh! what a relief is it to the burdened conscience, if but a few words can be stammered out for God, even though there are no sensible refreshings of his presence upon the soul. But if we wish to speak for him with power and acceptance, the word of truth must be “spoken out of the abundance of the heart.”¶ When “the heart is inditing a good matter, speaking of the things touching the king, our tongue will be as the pen of a ready writer.”** This prayer is the same confidence of faith that was expressed in the preceding verse—“For I have hoped in thy judgments;” an acceptable frame of approach to God, and an earnest of the revival of life and comfort in the Lord’s best time and way.

* Ps. cxlv. 10—13. † Ecc. iii. 7. ‡ Amos v. 13. § Ps. xxxix. 2, 3.

|| Gen. xxviii. 12. ‘Why do I make any of my visits to any of my neighbours, or countenance their visits unto me? Lord, I desire to let fall something, that may be for the good of the company; even, that more may be known of thee, and done for thee, from what passes in it. And when I propose to ingratiate myself unto any people by the civilities of conversation, it shall be, that I may gain thereby the better advantages to prosecute purposes upon them. In conversation, I would especially lay hold on all advantages to introduce as much as I can of lovely Christ into the view of all that I come near unto.’ Cotton Mather, Student and Pastor, pp. 74, 75.

¶ Matt. xii. 34. ** Psalm xlv. 42.

The Lord sometimes punishes the unfaithfulness of his people, in neglecting to use the spiritual weapon of his word, by "taking it out of their mouth" when they most need it. Let us then "hide it in our hearts." "Let it dwell in us richly in all wisdom,"* that it may be ready for every circumstance of emergency.

44. SO SHALL I KEEP THY LAW CONTINUALLY FOR EVER AND EVER.

THE heaping up of so many words in this short verse, appears to be the struggle of the soul to give something like an adequate expression of the vehemency of its longings to glorify its Saviour. And indeed the Lord's return to us, unsealing the lips of the dumb, and putting his word again into our mouth, brings with it a fresh sense of constraining obligation. A new prospect is opened of employment in his praise and service; not only as our present privilege, but as an antepast of our heavenly employment, when the word will never more be "taken out of our mouth;" but we shall be able to "talk of his wondrous works,"† and "to keep his law for ever and ever." The defects in the constancy and extent of our obedience, as far as our hearts are in a tender and gracious frame, must ever be our grief and burden; and the prospect of its completeness in a better world is that which renders heaven itself so blessed in anticipation. There we shall be blest with suitable feelings, and therefore be enabled to render suitable obedience—even one unbroken consecration of all our powers to his work. Then "shall we keep his law continually for ever and ever." When once we have found admittance before the throne of God, we "shall serve him day and night in his temple,"‡—without sin—without inconstancy—without weariness—without end! We speak of heaven; but oh! to be there! What is it? The service of love to a God of love throughout eternity! What can be wanting besides? In one day's continuance in the path of obedience even here, in the midst of the defilement, which stains our holiest services, how sweetly do the minutes roll away! But to be for ever engaged in this employment, in that place where "there shall in no wise enter any thing that defileth"§—it is this that gives an emphasis

* Col. iii. 16. † Verse 27. ‡ Rev. vii. 15. § Rev. xxi. 27.

and a dignity to the heavenly joy, which may well stamp it as “unspeakable and full of glory.”* May we not then encourage the hope that the Lord is making us meet for heaven, by the strength and constancy of our desires to “keep the law of God?” And is it not evident that heaven itself can afford no real delight to one who feels the service of God on earth to be irksome? He stands self-excluded by the constitution of his nature, by the necessity of the case. He has no heart for heaven, no taste for heaven, no capacity for the enjoyment of heaven—“He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still.”†

Heavenly, gracious Father, who and what are we, that our hearts should be made the unworthy recipients of thy grace? that our will should be subdued into “the obedience of faith?” and that we should be permitted to anticipate the blessed period when we shall “keep thy law continually for ever and ever?” May this prospect realize the happiness of our present obedience. May he who has “bought us with a price” for his glory, reign in our hearts, and live upon our lips, that each of us may have his mark upon our foreheads—the seal of his property in us, and of our obligation to him—“Whose I am, and whom I serve.”‡

45. AND I WILL WALK AT LIBERTY; FOR I SEEK THY PRECEPTS.

It was a fine expression of a heathen, ‘to serve God is to reign:’§ and certainly David appears to have found the liberty of a king in linking his affections to the service of God. The precepts of God were not forced upon him; “for he sought them,” as the source of continual enjoyment. Hear what he says of them—“more to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and the honey-comb. Moreover, by them is thy servant warned, and in keeping of them there is great

* 1 Pet. i. 8. † Rev. xxii. 11. ‡ Acts xxvii. 23.

§ ‘In regno vivimus. Deo servare est regnare.’—Seneca. When the female martyr Agatha was upbraided, because, being descended of an illustrious parentage, she stooped to mean and humble offices—‘Our nobility,’ she replied, ‘lies in this, that we are the servants of Christ.’ Sumner’s Evidences, pp. 359, 360.

reward.”* The way of the Lord, which to the carnal view is beset with thorns and briers on every side, to the child of God is a way of liberty. Without fear or anxiety, in the gladness of his heart, and the rejoicing of his conscience, he walks on in the king’s highway. Even in seeking these precepts, there is liberty to be enjoyed, unknown to the worldling, the sensualist, or the professor; an enlargement of heart, a natural motion like that of the sun in his course, “going forth as a bridegroom, and rejoicing as a strong man to run a race.”† What must it be, then, to walk in the full enjoyment of the precepts of God? “They shall sing in the ways of the Lord‡—for how great is his goodness! how great is his beauty!”§ But are we obeying them as our duty, or seeking them as our privilege? Oh! beware, lest unfaithfulness allowed in any part of your walk with God, straiten and cripple your soul. It is only in a persevering and self-denying pursuit of every track of the ways of God, that you can expect to enjoy the glow of spiritual activity and the healthfulness of Christian liberty—“If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”|| To have the whole stream of all our thoughts, actions, motives, desires, affections, carried in one undivided current towards God, is indeed most delightful evidence of the complete and unrestrained influence of love upon our hearts. There will often be considerable difficulty in suppressing the corrupt and rebellious inclinations of the natural mind; but as long as indulgence is denied, conflict excited, and resistance maintained in the constant endeavour to “bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,”¶—our liberty is established, even where it is not always enjoyed. The more we bind ourselves to the Lord, every fresh chain makes us feel more free.** While, then, they that “promise us liberty are themselves the servants of corruption,”†† O let us live as the children of God—the heirs of the kingdom—grateful—free blood-bought souls—remembering the infinite cost at which our liberty was purchased,

* Psalm xix. 10, 11. † Psalm xix. 5. ‡ Psalm cxxxviii. 5. § Zech. ix. 17. || John viii. 31, 32, 36. ¶ 2 Cor. x. 5.

** *Jugum Christi non deterit, sed honestat colla.*—BERNARD.

†† 2 Pet. ii. 19. Comp. John viii. 34.

and the moment of infinite peril when we are saved. When the flesh was weak, and "the law weak through the flesh,"* and no resolutions that we could make or perform, could extricate us from the yoke of sin—then it was that "Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living."† And then, indeed, do we "walk at liberty" in the way of his precepts, when we "break the bands" of all other lords "asunder," and consecrate ourselves entirely to his service. "O Lord our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us; but by thee only will we make mention of thy name."‡

46. I WILL SPEAK OF THY TESTIMONIES ALSO BEFORE KINGS,
AND WILL NOT BE ASHAMED.

LIBERTY in walking in the Lord's ways will naturally produce boldness in speaking of them. Compare the conduct of the three unshaken witnesses of the truth before the Babylonish monarch.§ Mark the difference of the spirit displayed by the Apostles, and especially by Peter before and after the day of Pentecost.|| Look at Stephen before the council,¶ and Paul before Felix,** Festus,†† and Agrippa.‡‡ "God had not given to them the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."§§ In this spirit we find the great Apostle testifying of himself—"I am ready to preach the Gospel to you that are at Rome

* Rom. viii. 3. † Rom. xiv. 9.

‡ Isa. xxvi. 13. An incident in the history of ancient Rome may furnish an illustration of that full liberty and entireness of heart, which form the act of acceptable surrender to the Lord. When the people of Collatia were negotiating an unconditional capitulation to the Romans, Egerius, on the part of the Romans, inquired of the ambassadors—"Are the people of Collatia in their own power?" When an affirmative answer was given, it was next inquired—"Do you deliver up yourselves—the people of Collatia—your city, your fields, your waters, your boundaries, your temples, your utensils, *all your property*, divine and human, into my power and the power of the Roman people?" *'We surrender all.'* "And so," said he, "I accept you."—Livy, Book i. Such may my surrender be to the Lord. Disentangled from every other yoke, under no bonds that ought to bind me, Lord, I offer myself and all that belongs to me, without exception or reserve, at thy feet. "But who am I, that I should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? For all things come of thee, and of thine own have I given thee." 1 Chron. xxix. 14.

§ Dan. iii. 16—18.

|| Contrast Matt. xxvi. 56, 69, 75, with Acts ii. iii. iv. v. We can scarcely believe that the same persons are alluded to. But the explanation of the difficulty had been given by anticipation. John vii. 38.

¶ Acts vi. vii. ** Acts xxiv. †† Acts xxv. ‡‡ Acts xxvi. §§ 2 Tim. i. 7.

also,"—at the metropolis of the world, in the face of all opposition and contempt, and at the imminent hazard of my life—"For," says he, "*I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.*"* In the same determination of soul, he exhorts his dear son in the faith—"Be not thou ashamed" of the testimony of the Lord, nor of me his prisoner."† With how many does "the fear of man bring a snare."‡ Many a good soldier has faced the cannon's mouth with undaunted front, and yet shrunk away with a coward's heart from the reproach of the cross, and been put to the blush even by the mention of the Saviour's name. Are we ready to bear our testimony for Jesus, when the sneer and ridicule of the ungodly are to be encountered? We have not to face the enmity of "kings." We are not likely to "be brought before kings and rulers for the Son of Man's sake."§ Yet divine help, and strong faith, are not less needed by us in standing against the enmity of a prejudiced relative or scornful neighbour. Young people! you are perhaps in especial danger of being ashamed of your Bible, your religion, your Saviour. You may often be brought under the "snare" of "the fear of man," and be tempted to compromise your religion, and to sacrifice your everlasting all from a dread of "the reproach of Christ." But remember him, who for your sake "before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession;"|| and will the dread of a name restrain you from sharing his reproach, and banish the love and gratitude you owe him from your hearts? Have you forgotten that you once owned the service of Satan, and will you not be bold for Christ, as you were for him? Were you once "glorying in your shame," and will you now be ashamed of your glory? O! remember who hath said—"Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."¶ Think much and often of this word. Think on this day. Think on the station of "the fearful and unbelieving" on the left hand on that day. Think on their eternal doom,** and pray and tremble for yourselves. Are you sincere? then remember your obligation, and "the love of Christ will constrain you,"†† not to a cold, calculating, reluctant service; but to

* Rom. i. 15, 16. † 2 Tim. i. 8. ‡ Prov. xxix. 25. § Luke xxi. 12. Mark xiii. 9. || 1 Tim. vi. 13. ¶ Mark viii. 38. ** Rev. xxi. 8. †† 2 Cor. v. 14.

a confession of your Saviour, bold, unfettered, and “faithful even unto death.”* Every deviation from the straight path bears the character of being ashamed of Christ. How much you have to speak in behalf of his testimonies, his ways, his love! When in danger of the influence of the fear of man, look to the Lord for strength. He “will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.”† This he gave to Stephen.‡ Ask it for yourselves, and you too shall be strengthened “to profess a good profession before many witnesses.”§

47. AND I WILL DELIGHT MYSELF IN THY COMMANDMENTS,
WHICH I HAVE LOVED.

IT is but poor comfort to the believer to be able to talk well to others upon the ways of God, and even to “bear the reproach” of his people, when his own heart is cold, insensible, and dull. He aspires at nothing less than delight in these ways, and he has the encouragement, that he shall not seek in vain. Why do we not more boldly use the language of faith, and say—“*I will delight myself in thy commandments?*” That which is the burden of the carnal heart is the delight of the renewed soul. The former “is enmity against God, and therefore is not, and cannot be, subject to his law.”|| The latter can delight in nothing else.—If the gospel separates the heart from the delights of a sinful world, it is only to make room for delights of a more elevated, satisfying, and enduring nature.¶ It is true Satan generally baits his temptations with that seductive witchery which the world calls pleasure. But has he engrossed all pleasure into his service? Are there no pleasures besides “the pleasures of sin?” Can the ways of the Lord promise nothing but difficulty and trial? What means, then, the experience of him who counted them “more to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey, and the honey-comb?”*** The marrow and

* Rev. ii. 10. † Luke xxi. 15. ‡ Acts vi. 10. § 1 Tim. vi. 12. || Rom. viii. 7.

¶ ‘Delectationes non amittimus, sed mutamus’—was the expression of one of the ancients. ‘I live a voluptuous life,’ said the excellent Joseph Alleine to his wife—‘but it is upon spiritual dainties, such as the world know not, nor taste not of.’

*** Psalm xix. 10.

fatness of our Father's house is surely a most gainful exchange for the husks of the far country.* The joy of the saint is not that false, polluted, deadly joy, which is all that the worldling knows, and all that he has to look for; but it flows spontaneously from the fountain of living waters through the pure channel of "the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." Nay, so independent is it of any earthly spring, that it never flourishes more than in the desolate wilderness, or the sick-bed solitude; so that "although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine, yet we will rejoice in the Lord, we will joy in the God of our salvation."† The world see what religion takes away, but they see little of what it gives;‡ else, instead of pitying our folly, they would reproach their own blindness. "Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry: behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty: behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed: behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit."§ But acceptable obedience must flow from love, and be accompanied with a measure of delight. And surely at the very time that we are "abhorring ourselves in dust and ashes" before our God, we have every reason to delight in his ways; and it cannot be entirely right with us, until something of this "delight in God's commandments" is felt and enjoyed. But do we complain of the dulness of our hearts, that we cannot "delight in the commandments of God?" Let us seek for a deeper impression of redeeming love. The result of such an impression cannot be less than grateful obedience and holy delight. Let us endeavour to turn our complaints into prayers, and the Lord will quickly turn them into praises. Let us watch against every thing that would intercept our communion with Jesus. Distance from him must be accompanied with poverty of spiritual enjoyment—"All our springs are in thee."

* Luke xv. 13—24. † Hab. iii. 17, 18.

‡ Cyprian in one of his epistles (ad Donat) mentions the great difficulty he found in overcoming the false view of the gloom of religion—little suspecting that the cause of the gloom was in himself—not in the Gospel. But this is explained, Matt. vi. 23.

§ Isaiah lxv. 13, 14.

48. MY HANDS ALSO WILL I LIFT UP UNTO THY COMMANDMENTS, WHICH I HAVE LOVED; AND I WILL MEDITATE IN THY STATUTES.

SCARCELY any expression seems to be equal to set forth the fervency of David's love and delight in the ways and word of God. Here we find him "lifting up his hands" with the gesture of one who is longing to embrace with both hands and his whole heart the object of his desire.* Perhaps also in "lifting up his hands unto the commandments," he might mean to express his looking upward for assistance to keep them and to live in them.† But how humbling this comparison with ourselves. Alas! how often, from the neglect of the influence of the Spirit of God, do our "hands hang down," instead of being "lifted up" in these holy ways. We are too often content with a scanty measure of love, going from day to day without any sensible "hungering and thirsting after righteousness;" neither able to pray with life and power, nor to hear with comfort and profit, nor to "do good and to communicate" with cheerfulness, nor to meditate with spiritual delight, nor to live for God with zeal and interest, nor to anticipate the endurance of the cross with unflinching resolution—the soul equally disabled for heavenly communion or active devotedness. Oh! let us beware of looking for ease under the power of this deadening malady. Let us rather struggle and cry for deliverance from it. Let us subscribe ourselves before God as wretched, and helpless, and guilty. Let us encourage ourselves before him with the thought that he can look upon us and revive us. Let us "take hold upon his covenant," and plead that *he will look upon us*. Let us put him in remembrance of the glory of his name, which is much more concerned in delivering us out of this frame, by his quickening and enlivening grace, than in leaving us, stupid, corrupt, and carnal, in it. Professor! awake; or beg of the Lord to awaken you! For if your cold sleeping heart is contented with the prospect of a heaven hereafter, without seeking for a present foretaste of its blessed enjoyments, it may be a very questionable matter whether heaven will ever be yours. If, however, there is delight, it will cherish an habitual meditation in the statutes, for he "whose delight is in the law of the Lord, in his law doth

* See Psalm cxliiii. 6. † See Psalm xxviii. 2.

he meditate day and night.”* The breathing of his heart is—“O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.”† It is in holy meditation on the word of God, that we are led to feel all the different changes of the spiritual life, and to bring into exercise all the graces of the Spirit. What is the acting of faith, but the reliance of the soul upon the promises of the word? What is the sensation of godly fear, but the soul trembling before the threatenings of God? What is the object of hope, but the apprehended glory of God? What is the principle of desire or love, but longing, endearing contemplations of the Saviour, and of the gospel blessing manifested in him? So that it is hardly possible to conceive of any effectual workings of grace separated from that spiritual meditation in the word, which, under the teaching sought from above, draws out its hidden contents, and exhibits them to the soul as the objects upon which the principles and affections of the divine life are habitually exercised. Not that any benefit can be expected from meditation, even upon the word of God, as an abstract duty. If not closely joined and mixed with prayer, it will most probably degenerate into dry, speculative study. Unless it be applied to some distinct practical purpose, it will be unedifying in itself, and unsatisfactory for the important ends designed by it, the discerning of the mind of God, and feeding upon the rich provision of the gospel.

Let it be a matter of daily inquiry—Does my reading of the word of God furnish food for my soul—matter for prayer—direction for conduct? Scriptural study, when entered upon in a prayerful spirit, will never, like many other studies, be unproductive. The mind that is set upon it, is fitly set for bearing fruit: it will “bring forth fruit in due season.”‡ Meditation kindles love, as it is the effect of love—“While I was musing, the fire burned.”§ “Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, this man is blessed in his deed.”|| But let us take heed that the root of religion in the soul is not cankered by the indulgence of secret sin. In the midst of the most abundant income of gospel ordinances, we may prove spiritual beggars, unless a diligent keeping of the heart preserves the inner man in a healthy and vigorous frame.

* Psalm i. 2. † Verse 97. ‡ Psalm i. 2, 3. § Psalm xxxix. 3. || James i. 25.

PART VII.

49. REMEMBER THE WORD UNTO THY SERVANT, UPON WHICH
THOU HAST CAUSED ME TO HOPE.

HAS God ever forgotten his word, that he needs to be reminded of it? or is it not that the desires, sincerity, faith, and patience of his people may be exercised? If he has “caused us to hope upon it,” still there are seasons when “hope deferred maketh the heart sick.”* Therefore let us wait at the throne of grace with the constant remembrance of the promises of a faithful God—“Remember the word unto thy servant.” Indeed, the proper use to be made of the promises is to furnish “arguments wherewith to fill our mouths when we order our cause before God.”† And when they are pleaded with the earnestness and humility of faith, they will be found to be divine and blessed realities. Besides, there are seasons in your experience, Christian reader, in which, doubtless, some word of God has been made especially precious to your soul, as illustrated in the daily occurrences of providence, or applied by the immediate power of the Spirit. Such words are thus made your own, and it will prove of most essential benefit to lay them up in your heart against some future time of trial, when you may bring them before your God, and “put him in remembrance”‡ of them. The same principle and acting of faith may be exercised in regard to the invitations of the gospel. Have they not been set before you, so that you have been “caused to hope” for an interest in them? Have you not often been arrested by such a word as this—“Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out?”§ Then do not question or neglect to exercise your right to plead it as a coming sinner—“Lord, I hope in this thy word—I believe that it is of thine own Spirit that I do hope in it—“thou hast caused me to hope” in it. “Remember this word unto thy servant.” Thus it is that prayer forms the promise of God into a prevailing argument, and sends it back to heaven, in the exercise of

* Prov. xiii. 12. † Job xxiii. 4. ‡ Isa. xliii. 26. § John vi. 37.

faith, nothing doubting but that it will be verified in God's best time and way.*

Again—If you have ever found power in God's word against any besetting sin, will it not be an encouragement, when again beset by the temptation, to look to the same source for help, in the assurance that he who hath delivered, doth deliver, and will even to the end “deliver?”† He “hath done great things for you”—And is not this an earnest of more? “Because thou hast been my help, therefore under the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.”‡ Faith is not trusting what the eye sees, but what the word promises; and we may at any time receive a promise in humble dependence as the distinct message to our souls, when we are conscious of a readiness to receive the whole word as the rule of our life and conversation. Indeed this is the experience and comfort of the life of faith. This unfolds the true secret of living to God—ending at last with the glorious testimony of a Christian death-bed. “Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth, and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof.”§

50. THIS IS MY COMFORT IN MY AFFLICTION: FOR THY WORD HATH QUICKENED ME.

DAVID was encouraged to plead the word of promise in prayer, from the recollection of its “comfort in” time of “affliction.” Never, indeed, are the children of God left unsupported in such a time, or called to drink a cup of unmingled tribulation. In the moments of their bitterest sorrow, they are compelled to stand amazed at the tenderness which is daily and hourly exercised towards them. Whatever our affliction may be, we need never be at a loss for some word exactly suited to it; and a “word spoken in due season, how good is it!”|| One word of God, sealed to

* We may observe Jacob making precisely this use of the word of promise to great advantage, at a time of personal extremity. Gen. xxxii. 9, 10, 12, with xxxi. 3, 13, xxviii. 13—15. Was not this in fact pleading—“Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope?” Compare also verse 38 of this Psalm.

† 2 Cor. i. 10. ‡ Psalm lxiii. 7. § Jos. xxiii. 14.

|| Prov. xv. 23. ‘I will show you a privilege that others want, and you have in this case. Such as are in prosperity, and are filled with earthly joys, and in-

the heart, infuses more sensible relief, than ten thousand words of man; and, when the gracious leadings of the Spirit have guided us in the word to an assurance of the presence of God in affliction,* of the continued pity and sympathy of the Lord in his most severe dispensations,† and of their certain issue to our everlasting good,‡ must not we say of the word—"This is our comfort in our affliction?" And do not our burdens feel lighter for the support of this word, as the channel in which the Saviour's love streams forth on every side, imparting life, refreshment and strength to those who, but for this comfort, would have "fainted,"§ and "perished in their affliction?"|| This, indeed, was the end for which the Scriptures were written;¶ and such power of consolation have they sometimes administered to the afflicted saint, that tribulation has almost ceased to be a trial, and the retrospect has been the source of thankful recollection. Only those, however, can apply the comfort of the word who have felt its quickening power. When dead in sin, it quickened us.** When sunk in trouble, it revived us,†† not, however, by any innate power of its own, but by the exhibition of the Saviour as the Spring of life and consolation. If, therefore, we come from the reading of the word without any warmth of affection, or any quickening to duty, we have surely read it in vain. And thus it always must be, except as under the teaching of the Spirit, we find that it "testifies of him"‡‡—"the consolation of Israel"§§—"afflicted in all our afflictions"|||—and never failing to uphold with "grace sufficient for us."¶¶ It is not, however, the word without the Spirit, nor the Spirit generally without the word, but the Spirit by the word—first putting life into the word,*** and then by the word quickening the soul. The

creased with children and friends; though the word of God is indeed written for their instruction, yet to you who are in trouble, and from whom the Lord hath taken many children, and whom he hath otherwise exercised, there are some chapters, some particular promises in the word of God, made in an especial manner, which would never have been yours so as they now are, if you had had your portion in this world like others. It is no small comfort, that God hath written some scriptures to you, which he hath not to others. Read these, and think God is like a friend, who sendeth a letter to a whole house and family, but who speaketh in his letter to some by name, that are dearest to him in the house.—Rutherford's Letters.

* Isa. xliii. 1, 2. † Exodus iii. 7. ‡ Rom. viii. 28. § Psalm xxvii. 13. || Verse 92. ¶ Rom. xv. 4. ** James i. 18. † Pet. i. 23. †† Verses 81, 82. ‡‡ John v. 39. §§ Luke ii. 25. ||| Isa. lxiii. 9. ¶¶ 2 Cor. xii. 9. *** John vi. 63.

word, then, is only the instrument. The Spirit is the Almighty agent. Thus the work is the Lord's, and nothing is left for us but the exercise of submission and the song of praise.

51. THE PROUD HAVE HAD ME GREATLY IN DERISION; YET HAVE
I NOT DECLINED FROM THY LAW.

IF David, a king, a man of wisdom and prudence, and therefore not likely to provoke unnecessary offence, and whose character and rank might be expected to command respect; if he was not shielded from "the derision of the proud" on account of the profession and service of his God, surely it furnishes a striking confirmation of the declaration—"Yea, and *all that will live godly in Christ Jesus* shall suffer persecution."* But thus it ever was, and ever will be, that if we have faith to believe the doctrines of Christ, and to conform to the strict commandments of the Gospel, we must prepare to encounter the taunts of the unbeliever and the worldling. Yet, where the heart is right with God, the "derision of the proud," instead of forcing us to decline from the law of God, will strengthen our adherence to it. Thus David answered the bitter derision of Michal with a stronger resolution to abide by his God—"I will yet be more vile than thus."† He counted it his glory, his duty, his joy. None, however, but a believer knows what it is to bear the contempt and derision of an ungodly world, and none but a real believer can bear it. It is one of the touchstones of sincerity, the application of which has often been the means of "separating the precious from the vile," unmasking the self-confident professor, to his own confusion. Oh! how many make a fair profession and appear "good soldiers of Jesus Christ," until the hour of danger proves them deserters. But it is of great importance to those who are just setting out in the warfare, to be well armed with the word of God. It kept David steadfast amidst "the derision of the proud;" and it will keep young Christians from being frightened or overcome by their contact with the sneer of an ungodly world. But that it may "dwell in us *richly in all wisdom*,"‡ and be suited to our own case, it will be well, under circumstances of reproach, to acquaint ourselves with those declarations that speak

* 2 Tim. iii. 12. † 2 Sam. vi. 20—22. ‡ Col. iii. 16.

support and encouragement to sufferers for righteousness sake.* Above all, the contemplation of the great Sufferer himself, meeting this poignant trial in meekness,† compassion, and prayer,‡ will furnish “a refuge from the storm, and a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall.”§ The mere professor knows not this refuge; he possesses not this armour, or he knows not how to use it; so that, “when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word’s sake, immediately he is offended.”|| Blessed be God! the weapons of our warfare are drawn from the divine armory, and therefore, depending on the grace of Jesus, and following his example, we shall find that to suffer is the way to victory—the road to an everlasting crown.

52. I REMEMBERED THY JUDGMENTS OF OLD, O LORD; AND
HAVE COMFORTED MYSELF.

THE recollections of the Lord’s former dealings with his people appear to have been David’s support while smarting under “the scourge of the tongue.”¶ And perhaps few subjects of meditation are more fruitful in encouragement. We are ready to imagine something peculiar in our own case, and to “think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try us, as though some strange thing happened unto us;”** but when we “remember the Lord’s judgments of old,” with his people, we “comfort ourselves” in the assurance, that “the same afflictions are accomplished in our brethren, that have been in the world,”†† and that, “as the sufferings of Christ have abounded in them, so their consolation also abounded by Christ.”‡‡ They always encountered the same “derision of the proud,” and always experienced the same support from the faithfulness of their God. We do not probably remember, as we ought, the mercy and gracious wisdom of God in occupying so much of his written word with the records of his “judgments

* Such as the benediction of the Saviour, Luke vi. 22, 23, confirmed by the recorded experience of the Lord’s most favoured servants, the Apostles—Acts v. 41.—Paul especially, 2 Cor. xii. 10; Col. i. 24—the disciples of Thessalonica, 1 Thess. i. 6—the Hebrew Christians, Heb. x. 34.

† Psalm xxii. 6—8. Luke xxiii. 35. ‡ Luke xxiii. 34. § Isa. xxv. 4. || Mark iv. 17. ¶ Job v. 21. ** 1 Peter iv. 12. †† 1 Pet. v. 9. ‡‡ 2 Cor. i. 5.

of old.” With some a prominent attention is paid to the preceptive, and with others to the doctrinal parts of revelation—each class seeming to forget, that the historical records comprise a full and striking illustration of both, and in this view have always proved most supporting grounds of consolation to exercised souls. There must, indeed, obviously have been some important design in casting so large a portion of the small volume of Revelation into an historical form, and the design that appears throughout is every way worthy of its Author. “Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we through *patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope* ;”* and how admirably adapted the means are to the end, those who are most diligent in the search of the Scripture-field will bear ample witness. Whoever, therefore, wilfully neglect the historical portion of the sacred volume from the idea of confining their attention to what they deem the more spiritual parts of Scripture, they show a sad deficiency of spiritual apprehension, and deprive themselves of most valuable instruction, and most abundant comfort. From the view which has just been given of the design of the historical records, it is plain that the neglect of them would exclude us from one eminent means of increasing “patience” in the example of those, “who through faith and patience inherit the promises”—of receiving “comfort” in the experience of the faithfulness of God manifested in every age to his people—and of enlivening our “hope” in marking the happy issue of the “patience of the saints,” and the heavenly support administered unto them.† So far, therefore, are we from being little interested in the record of past ages, that it is evident that the sacred historians, as well as the prophets, “ministered not unto themselves, but unto us the things which are now reported.”‡

Let us select one or two instances as illustrative of this subject. Why was the record of the deluge—why was the overthrow of the cities of the plain preserved, but as an exhibition to the church that “the Lord,” the Saviour of Noah the eighth person, and the deliverer of just Lot—

* Rom. xv. 4.

† In this view, the recollection of the Lord’s judgments of old “puts a new song into the mouth” of the Church, of “thanksgiving unto her God.” Isaiah xxv. 1—4.

‡ 1 Pet. i. 12.

“knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished?”* What a source of “comfort,” then, to the tempted people of God is the “remembrance of this judgment of old!” And if we instance the wonderful history of the overthrow of the Egyptians, and the consequent deliverance of God’s ancient people, we may continually observe the church recollecting this interposition as a ground of assurance, that under similar circumstances of trial, the same illustrious displays of divine faithfulness and love may be confidently expected—looking back upon what has been done by the “arm of the Lord in ancient days, and in the generation of old,” as the pattern of what the Lord ever would be, and ever would do for his purchased people.† We remark God himself recalling to our mind this overthrow and deliverance as a ground of present encouragement and support—“*According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt* will I show unto him marvellous things”‡—and the Church echoing back this remembrance in the expression of her faith, gratitude, and expectation—“He will *subdue* our iniquities, and *thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.*”§ Such is the interesting use that may be made of the historical parts of Scripture. Such is the “comfort” to be derived from the “remembrance of the Lord’s judgments of old!” And is not the recollection of his “judgments of old” with ourselves, productive of the same support? Does not the retrospect of his dealings with our own souls serve to convince us, that “all his paths are mercy and truth?”|| The assurance is therefore warranted alike by experience and by Scripture,—“We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”¶¶

53. HORROR HATH TAKEN HOLD UPON ME, BECAUSE OF THE
WICKED THAT FORSAKE THY LAW.

SURELY with a compassionate and reflecting mind, the condition of the world must excite commiseration and concern! A “whole world lying in wickedness!”** lying therefore in ruins! the image of God effaced! the presence of

* 2 Peter ii. 5—9. † Isa. li. 9—11. ‡ Micah vii. 15. § Verse 19.
¶ Psalm xxv. 10. ¶ Rom. viii. 28. ** 1 John v. 19.

God departed! "Horror hath taken hold of me!" to see the law of Him who gave being to the world so little regarded! so utterly forsaken! So much light and love shining from heaven in vain! The earthly heart cannot endure that any restraint should be imposed, much less that any constraint, even of love, should be employed to change its bias and turn it back to its God. Are you then a believer? then will you be most tender of the honour of the law of God. Every stroke at his law you will feel as a stroke at your own heart. Are you a believer? then will you consider every man as your brother, and weep to see so many of them around you, crowding the broad road of destruction, and perishing as the miserable victims of their own deceivings. The prospect on every side is as if God were cast down from his throne, and the creatures of his hand were committing murder against their own souls. But when we are in a declining state, when we feel cold and languid respecting our own eternal interests, how invariably does it affect the tenderness of our regard for the honour of our God; so that we can look at "the wicked that forsake God's law" with comparative indifference and unconcern. But how awful the thought, that it ever can be with us a small matter, that multitudes are sinking! going down into perdition! with the name of Christ! under the seal of baptism! partakers of the means of gospel grace! yet perishing! Not indeed that we are to yield to a paralyzing feeling of horror, that would awaken no powers of exertion on their behalf. Do we owe them no duty—no prayer—no labour? Shall we look upon souls hurrying on with such dreadful haste to unutterable, everlasting torments, and permit them to rush on blindfolded, unawakened, unalarmed? If there is a "horror" to see a brand apparently fitting for the fire, will there not be a wrestling endeavour to pluck that brand out of the fire? Have we quite forgotten in our own case the fearful terrors of an unconverted state—the Almighty power of wrath and justice armed against us—the thunder of that voice—"Vengeance belongeth unto me; I will recompense, saith the Lord?"* Oh! if the love of the Saviour and the love of souls were reigning with more mighty influence in our hearts, how much more devoted should we be in our little sphere of labour, and how much more enlarged in our supplications, until all the kingdom of Satan were

* Heb. x. 30. Rom. xii. 19, with Deut. xxxii. 3.

subject to the obedience of the Son of God, and conquered by the force of his omnipotent love.

But if the spirit of David, renewed but in part, was thus filled with horror in the contemplation of the wicked—what must have been the affliction—what the intensity of His sufferings—“who was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners”^{*}—yea, “of purer eyes than to behold iniquity”[†]—during thirty-three years of continued contact with a world of sin? What shall we say of the condescension of his love in wearing “the likeness of sinful flesh”[‡]—dwelling among sinners—yea, “receiving sinners, and eating with them!”[§]

Blessed Spirit! impart to us more of “the mind that was in Christ Jesus!” that the law of God may be increasingly precious in our eyes, and that we may be “exceedingly jealous for the Lord God of hosts!” Help us, by thy gracious influence, to plead with sinners for God, and to plead for sinners with God!

54. THY STATUTES HAVE BEEN MY SONGS IN THE HOUSE OF MY PILGRIMAGE.

COME, Christian pilgrim, and beguile your wearisome journey heavenward by “singing the Lord’s song in this strange land.”^{||} With the statutes of God in your hand and in your heart, you are furnished with a song for every step of your way—“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.”[¶] A song such as this cannot fail to smooth your path, and reconcile you to the many inconveniences of the way, while the recollection, that it is here only “the house of your pil-

^{*} Heb. vii. 26. [†] Hab. i. 13. Compare Psalm v. 5. [‡] Rom. viii. 3.
[§] Luke xv. 2. ^{||} Psalm cxxxvii. 4. [¶] Psalm xxii.

grimage," and not your home, and that "there remaineth a rest for the people of God,"* will support the exercise of faith and patience to the end. The same statutes which are the yoke and burden of the worldly professor, are the subject of the believer's daily song, and the source of his daily comfort, leading him from pleasure to pleasure, and, under the cherishing vigour of gracious communications, making his way and work easy and prosperous. Evidently, therefore, our knowledge of the Lord's statutes, and our delight in them, will furnish a decisive test of our real state before God. But what reason have we every moment to guard against that debasing, stupifying influence of the world, which makes us forget the proper character of a pilgrim! And what habitual conflict must be maintained with the sloth and aversion of a reluctant heart to maintain our progress in the journey towards Zion! Reader—have you entered upon a pilgrim's life? Then what is your solace? What is your refreshment on the road? It is dull, heavy, wearisome, to be a pilgrim without a "song." And yet the Lord's statutes must be understood and felt in all their blessed experience, before they will form our "song." And "if you have tasted that the Lord is gracious,"† if "he has put a new song into your mouth,"‡ Oh! do not suffer any carelessness or neglect to rob you of this heavenly anticipation. Let not your lips be found mute. Seek to keep your heart in tune. Seek to maintain a lively contemplation of the place whither you are going—of Him who as your "forerunner is for you entered"§ thither—and of the prospect, that when he has "prepared a place for you, he will come again, and take you to himself, that where he is, there you may be also."|| In this spirit, and in these hopes before you, you may take up your song—"O God! my heart is fixed: I will sing, and give praise. I will bless the Lord at all times—his praise shall continually be in my mouth."¶ Thus may you go on your pilgrimage, "singing in the ways of the Lord,"** and commencing a song below, which, in the world of praise above, shall never, never cease.††

* Heb. iv. 9. † 1 Pet. ii. 3. ‡ Psalm xl. 3. § Heb. vi. 20. || John xiv. 2, 3. ¶ Psalm cviii. 1; xxxiv. 1. ** Psalm cxxxviii. 5. †† Rev. iv. 8.

55. I HAVE REMEMBERED THY NAME, O LORD, IN THE NIGHT,
AND HAVE KEPT THY LAW.

IF at any time we are enabled to spend the waking moments of the night with God, "the darkness is no darkness to us, but the night shineth as the day." David often speaks of peculiar enjoyments at these seasons, of times of especial satisfaction and refreshment, when he "remembered the name of his God in the night season."* And this cordial for the distressing restlessness of a wakeful night many a tried believer can recommend, as having found it more restorative to the quiet of his earthly frame than the most sovereign specifics of the medical world. "So he giveth his beloved sleep."† And if in the "night season" of affliction we feel the hand of the Lord grievous to us, we shall find in "the remembrance of the Lord" a never-failing support. What does our darkness arise from, but from our forgetfulness of God, that we have lost for a while the lively impressions of his tender care, his unchanging faithfulness, and his mysterious methods of working his own will? And to bring up as it were from the grave the remembrance of God's name as manifested in his promises, and in the dispensation of his love; this is indeed the "light, that is sown for the righteous,"‡ and which "springeth up out of darkness."§ It is to eye the character of the Lord as All-wise to appoint, Almighty to secure, All-compassionate to sympathize and support. It is to recollect him as a "father pitying his children,"|| as a "friend that loveth at all times,"¶ and "that sticketh closer than a brother."** And even in those seasons of depression, when the indulgence of sin, or the neglect of tenderness of spirit, have brought the darkness of night upon the soul, though "the remembrance of the name of the Lord" may be grievous, yet it opens the way to consolation. It tells us that there is a way made for our return, that "the Lord waiteth that he might be gracious,"†† and that in the first step of our return to our Father, we shall find him full of mercy to his backsliding children.‡‡ And thus, though "weeping may endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning."§§

* Psalm lxiii. 5, 6. † Psalm cxxvii. 2. ‡ Psalm xcvi. 11. § Psalm xii. 4.
|| Psalm ciii. 13. ¶ Prov. xvii. 17. ** Prov. xviii. 24. †† Isa. xxx. 18.
‡‡ See Luke xv. 20. §§ Psalm xxx. 5.

But let us inquire into the Lord's revelation of his own name, and we shall be at no loss to conceive of its support in the darkest midnight of tribulations. "And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him, (Moses,) and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed—The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin, and will by no means clear the guilty."* Can we wonder that such a name as this should be exhibited as a ground of trust? "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." "They that know thy name will put their trust in thee."† Even our gracious Saviour appears to have derived support from "the remembrance of the name of the Lord in the night season" of desertion—"O my God, I cry in the day time, and thou hearest not; and in the night-season, and am not silent. *But thou art holy*, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel."‡ And from the experience of this source of consolation, we find the tempted Saviour directing his tempted people to the same support. "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light, let him *trust in the name of the Lord*, and stay upon his God."§ Indeed all the rest that can be anticipated in this world of trouble can come only from this source—the "remembrance of the Lord's name"—what he is in himself, and what he has promised to be to us. How vast, then, are the obligations to his dear Son, as the only medium by which this name could ever be known or remembered! "No man hath seen God at any time: the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."|| As, however, we are taught to know his name, the remembrance of the support received from it will be a constraining motive to obedience. We shall "keep his law," when we "remember his name." A sense of our obligations will impel us forward into the path of duty, and will indeed have a most happy influence in promoting diligence, heavenly-mindedness, and self-devotedness in whatever sphere of action may be appointed for us. Obedience will partake far more of the character of privilege than of

* Exod. xxxiv. 5, 6. † Prov. xviii. 10. Psalm ix. 10. ‡ Psalm xxii. 2, 3. § Isa. i. 10. || John i. 18. also vii. 6. Matt. xi. 27.

duty, when an enlightened knowledge of God is the principle of action.

56. THIS I HAD, BECAUSE I KEPT THY PRECEPTS.

How is it, believer, that you are enabled to “sing of the Lord’s statutes” and to “remember his name?” “This you have, because you keep his precepts.” Thus you are able to tell the world, that “in keeping his commandments there is great reward”*—that “the work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness, and assurance for ever.”† And in what path beside could you expect to realize this enjoyment of your Christian privileges?—“He that hath *my commandments* and *keepeth* them, he it is *that loveth* me; and he that *loveth me shall be loved* of my Father, and I will love him, and will *manifest myself* to him—my Father will love him; and *we will come* unto him, and make our abode with him.”‡ If you were walking more closely with God in “the obedience of faith,” the world would never dare to accuse religion as the source of melancholy or despondency. Who has any right to the hope of happiness in a world of tribulation, but he that is seeking it in the favour of God? And when is the favour of God to be found, but when the soul is moulded into a conformity to his will, and delight in his law? But let us remark how continually David was enriching his treasury of spiritual experience with some fresh view of the dealings of God with his soul, some answer to prayer, some accession of grace, or some increase of consolation, which he records for his own encouragement, and for the use of the Church of God. Let us seek to imitate him in this respect; and we shall often be enabled to say as he does—“This I had”—this comfort I enjoyed—this support in trouble—this remarkable manifestation of his love—this confidence I was enabled to maintain—“this I had”—it was made my own—“because I kept thy precepts.” And how important in the absence of spiritual enjoyment to examine—“is there not a cause?” and what is the cause? Have not “strangers devoured my strength, and I knew it not?”§ Is the Lord “with me

[* Psalm xix. 11. † Isa. xxxii. 17. ‡ John xiv. 21, 23. § Hos. vii. 9.

as in months past?"* with me in my closet?—with me in my family?—with me at my table?—with me in my daily employments and intercourse with the world? When I hear the faithful people of God telling of his love, and saying—"This I had,"—must I not, if unable to join their cheerful acknowledgment, trace it to my unfaithful walk, and say,—“This I had” not, because I have failed in obedience to thy precepts, because I have been careless and self-indulgent, because I have slighted thy love, because I have “grieved thy Holy Spirit,” and forgotten to “ask for the old paths, that I might walk therein, and find rest to my soul?”† This scrutiny and recollection of our ways, will lead to healing—restoration—increasing devotedness—tenderness of conscience—circumspection of walk, and a determination not to rest until we can make this grateful acknowledgment our own. At the same time, instead of boasting that our own arm, our own diligence, or holiness, “have gotten us” into this favour, we shall cast all our attainments at the feet of Jesus, and crown him Lord of all for ever.

PART VIII.

57. THOU ART MY PORTION, O LORD; I HAVE SAID THAT I WOULD
KEEP THY WORDS.

MAN, as a dependent being, must be possessed of some portion. He cannot live upon himself. He must also have a large portion, because the powers and capacities to be filled are large. If he has not a satisfying portion, he is a wretched, empty creature. But where and how is he to find this portion? “There be many who say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us!”‡ Ah! who can speak of the goodness of the Lord in having offered himself as the portion of an unworthy sinner, and having engaged to employ his perfections for his happiness? Or who can speak of the folly and madness, and guilt of the sinner, in choosing his “por-

* Job xxix. 2. † Jer. vi. 16. ‡ Psalm iv. 6.

tion in this life,"* as if there was no God on the earth, or no way of access to him, or no happiness to be found in him? That such madness should be found in the heart of man is a most affecting illustration of his departure from God; but that *God's own* "*people* should commit these two evils, forsaking the fountain of living waters, and hewing out broken cisterns for themselves," is the fearful astonishment of heaven itself.† And yet how can we know and enjoy God as our portion, except as he has manifested himself in his dear Son, in the covenant of grace? And in the knowledge and enjoyment of him, how little reason have we to envy those, who "in their life-time receive their good things,"‡ and therefore have nothing more to expect. Never indeed does the poverty of the worldling's portion appear more striking than when contrasted with the enjoyment of a child of God§—"Soul," said the rich fool, "thou hast much goods laid up for many years. But God said, This night shall thy soul be required of thee."|| Augustine's prayer was—"Lord, give me thyself!"¶ And in this spirit the believer is ready to exult—"Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. Return unto thy rest, O my soul. The Lord himself is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup. Thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places, yea, I have a goodly heritage. I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel."** Surely the whole world cannot weigh against the comfort of being able to let all go, and look up—"Thou art my portion, O Lord." For unless his perfections should moulder away, and leave him a destitute and indigent God, it is impossible that his people can be impoverished. This portion, however, can never be enjoyed, even by a child of God, unless he who is the essence of it is supreme in the soul—not only above all, but in the place of all. Other objects may be subordinatedly loved, but of none but himself must we say, "*He is altogether lovely.*"†† "In all things he must have the pre-eminence"‡‡—One with the Father in our affections as in his own subsistence.§§ The moment that any rival is allowed to usurp the throne of the heart, we open the door to disappointment and unsatisfied desires. But if we take the

* Psalm xvii. 14. † Jer. ii. 12, 13. ‡ Luke xvi. 25; vi. 24. § Comp. Psalm xvii. 14, 15. || Luke xii. 19, 20. ¶ Da mihi te, Domine. ** Ps. lxxiii. 25; cxvi. 7; xvi. 5—7. †† Can. v. 16. ‡‡ Col. i. 18. §§ John x. 30.

Lord as our "portion," must we not take him as our king? "I have said, that I would keep thy words." This view will furnish a complete picture of the Christian's character—taking the Lord as his "portion," and his word as his rule. In delighting himself in the Lord, he secures his heart's desire.* In obeying the Lord he evidences his interest in the Gospel salvation; for "Christ, being made perfect, became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him."† His obligation flows from his privilege—and all that he is, and all that he has, is the Lord's, cheerfully surrendered as his right, and willingly employed in his service. Let me inquire respecting my choice of God—Was it deliberate, free, unreserved? Am I resolved that it shall be steadfast and abiding? That death itself shall not separate me from the object of it? Am I ready to receive a Sovereign as well as a Saviour? Oh! let me have a whole Christ for my portion! Oh! let him have a whole heart for his possession. Oh! let me call nothing mine but him.

58. I ENTREATED THY FAVOUR WITH MY WHOLE HEART; BE
MERCIFUL UNTO ME ACCORDING TO THY WORD.

HAVE we chosen the Lord for our "portion?" Then we shall "entreat his favour" as "life"‡ and "better than life"§ to our souls. Have we "said, that we would keep his words?" Then we shall still "entreat his favour" to strengthen and encourage us in his way. We shall "entreat it with our whole hearts," as though we felt our infinite need of it, and were determined to wrestle for it in Jacob's spirit—"I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."|| Those, indeed, whose unspeakable happiness it is to be brought into the favour of God, "by the blood of Christ,"¶ and who "by him also have access unto that grace wherein they stand,"** know how to prize the sense of Divine favour, the light of their Father's countenance. They are never weary of this source of daily enjoyment. It is to them as the light of the sun, which shineth every day with renewed and unabated pleasure. They "joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom they have now received the atonement."†† Mercy, however, is the source of that favour which we entreat, and the word is the warrant of our ex-

* Psalm xxxvii. 4. † Heb. v. 9. ‡ Psalm xxx. 5. § Psalm lxiii. 3. || Gen. xxxii. 26. ¶ Eph. ii. 13. ** Rom. v. 1, 2. †† Rom. v. 11.

pectation—"Be merciful unto us according to thy word." As sinners, we need this favour. As believers, we ask for it, in the assurance that praying breath, as the breath of faith, will not be spent in vain, and that "after we have patiently endured, we shall inherit the promise."* Yet experience has told us, that any indulged indolence, or neglect, or unfaithfulness, relaxing the diligence of our walk, and keeping back the "whole heart" from God, will never fail to remove the sunshine from the soul, until in the exercise of contrition and faith we shall have again returned to our God. But "if *from thence* thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with *all thine heart*, and all thy soul."† The more there is of our heart in seeking, the more there will be of the Lord's heart in returning to us—"I will rejoice over them," saith he, "to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly, *with my whole heart and with my whole soul.*"‡

Reader! if you are a child of God, the favour of God will be to you the "one thing needful." In other things, you will not venture to choose for yourself; "for who knoweth what is good for man in this life?"§ But in this choice you will be decided. This grand incomparable desire will fill your heart. This will be to you as the portion of ten thousand worlds. Nothing will satisfy besides.

59. I THOUGHT ON MY WAYS, AND TURNED MY FEET UNTO THY TESTIMONIES.

How many appear to pass through the world into eternity without a serious "thought on their ways!" Multitudes live for the world, forget God! and die! This is their history. What their state is, is written as with a sunbeam in the word of truth—"The wicked shall be turned into hell, and *all the nations that forget God.*"|| To banish reflection is indeed the highway to ruin. Perhaps one serious thought might be the new birth of the soul to God—the first step of the way to heaven—"no man repenteth him of his wickedness, saying, *What have I done?*"¶—is the character and ruin of an unthinking world. But when a man is arrested by the power of grace, he is as one awaking out of sleep,

* Heb. vi. 15. † Deut. iv. 29. ‡ Jer. xxxii. 41. § Eccles. vi. 12. || Psalm ix. 17. ¶ Jer. viii. 6.

lost in solemn and serious thought,—‘What am I? * where am I? what have I been? what have I been doing? I have a soul which is my everlasting all—yet a soul without a Saviour—lost—undone. What is my prospect for its happiness? Behind me is a world of vanity, an empty void. Before me a fearful unknown eternity. Within me an awakened conscience, to remind me of an angry God, and a devouring hell. If I stay here, I perish—if I go forward, I perish—if I go back, and return home to my offended Father, I can but perish.’ † The resolution is formed—“I will arise,” ‡ and fight my way through all difficulties and discouragements to my Father’s way and my Father’s throne; “I have thought on my ways, and” now I “turn my feet unto thy testimonies.” Thus it is more or less distinctly with every prodigal child of God. He returns to himself, as the first step of return to his God. For sin is not only his turning away from God, but from himself—from his own soul—from his own happiness. Grace, therefore, is a conversion, not only to God, but to himself. The gospel recalls his vain and wandering spirit to return home into himself. The serious self-inspection brings consideration and leads to holy resolution; and “*because he considereth and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live—he shall not die.*” §

But it is not only upon the first entrance into the ways of God that this consideration is needed. The believer will feel its importance as forming a part of the daily habit of his experience. Nothing but disorder will be found within except this daily “communing with our own hearts” || be maintained. Probably David did not know how far his feet had backslidden from the ways of his God, until this serious consideration of his state brought conviction to his soul—so imperceptible is the declining of the heart from God! Nor is it a few transient thoughts or resolutions that will effect this turn of the heart to God! Much struggle is to be encountered in the sincere determination to forsake all other ways and inclinations, that enslave the natural heart in sin, or beguile it in its own deceitfulness. And, therefore,

* How utterly unmeaning was the celebrated aphorism of antiquity—“Know thyself”—until explained and illustrated by the light of revelation.

† Compare 2 Kings vii. 4. ‡ Luke xv. 18. § Ezek. xviii. 23. || Psalm iv. 4.

no progress can be safely or successfully made, without committing our way to the Lord. "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see *if there be any wicked way* in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Turn thou me, and I shall be turned, for thou art the Lord my God."* Much depends here upon cultivating the spirit of "godly jealousy" over our hearts. Much account will be made of faithfulness in listening to the first whisper of the convincing voice of the Spirit, marking before us the early steps of secret declension from God.† Much matter also of thankfulness there will be even for the chastening rod, that may be the appointed means of awakening us to reflection and return to God. For so prone are we to turn our feet away from the Lord—so continually are we "turning aside like a deceitful bow"‡—and so deaf are we, from the constitution of our sinful nature, to the ordinary calls of God, that in love and tender faithfulness to our souls, is he often constrained by the stroke of his heavy hand to arrest us in our career of thoughtlessness, and turn us back to himself. Most suitable then for such a state is the prayer of Basil—"Give me any cross, that may bring me into subjection to thy cross, and save me in spite of myself!"

60. I MADE HASTE, AND DELAYED NOT TO KEEP THY COMMANDMENTS.

No time must be lost between making resolutions and performing them. There is no room for delay. It is a matter of life and death—of eternal life and eternal death.§ Many a precious soul has been lost by waiting for "a more convenient season;"|| a period which probably may never arrive, and which the wilful neglect of present opportunity provokes God to put far away. At least no time is so acceptable to God as to-day—To-morrow ruins thousands—To-morrow is in another world. "*To-day, while it is called to-day—if ye will hear his voice*"¶—"make haste and delay not." Resolutions, however sincere, and convictions, however serious, will "pass away as the morning cloud and as the early dew,"** unless they are carefully cherished and in-

* Psalm cxxxix. 23, 24. Jer. xxxi. 18. † See Isaiah xxx. 21. ‡ Psalm lxxviii. 57. § See Deut. xxx. 18. || Acts xxiv. 25. ¶ Heb. iv. 7. ** Hos. vi. 4.

stantly improved. The bonds of iniquity will soon prove too strong for the bonds of your own resolutions, and in the first hour of temptation, convictions left to chance to grow will prove as unable to resist the opposition of the enemy, as were the "seven green withs"—to bind the giant Samson.* If ever delays are dangerous, much more are they in this concern of eternity. If, therefore, convictions begin to work, yield to their influence without delay. If any worldly or sinful desire is touched, let this be the moment for its crucifixion. If any affection is kindled towards the Saviour, give immediate expression to its voice. If any grace is reviving, let it be called forth into instant duty. This is the best—the only expedient to fix and detain the motion of the Spirit now striving in the heart, and who knoweth but the improvement of the present advantage may be the moment of victory over difficulties hitherto found insuperable, and may open our path to heaven with less interruption and more steady progress? It is from the neglect of this "haste," that convictions in so many instances alternately ebb and flow so long before they settle in a sound conversion. Indeed it is this instant movement—"making haste and delaying not"—that marks the principle of the spiritual life. Thus it was with the prodigal. His resolution was no sooner formed than in action. He said—"I will arise and go to my father—and *he arose* and came to his father."† When Matthew heard the voice—"Follow me—*he left all, rose up* and followed him."‡ When Zaccheus was called from the top of the sycamore tree—"Make haste and come down, for to-day I must abide at thy house—*he made haste and came* down, and received him joyfully."§ Ah! as you prize a hope for eternity, as you wish to "flee from the wrath to come," and to "flee for refuge to the hope set before you"—beware of smothering early convictions. They may prove the first dawn of eternal day upon the soul—the first visit of the quickening Spirit to the heart. Guard them with unceasing watchfulness—Nourish them with believing prayer—"Exercise" them unto practical "godliness,"||—"Quench not the Spirit"¶—Let not the spark be extinguished by opposition of the world. Let it not expire for want of the fuel of grace—Let it not be dormant—inactive ;

* Judges xvi. 9. † Luke xv. 18—20. ‡ Luke v. 27, 28. § Luke xix. 5, 6. Comp. also the example of Paul, Gal. i. 15, 16. || 1 Tim. iv. 7. ¶ 1 Thess. v. 19.

“Stir up the gift of God which is in thee.”* Every exercise, every motion, adds grace to grace, increases its vigour, health, and fruitfulness. The more we do, the more we find we can do. The withered hand, when stretched forth in any single act in obedience to the Saviour’s word, and in dependence on his grace, will never fail of a supply of spiritual strength.† Every successive act strengthens the disposition, until a continued succession has formed the habit of the soul, ready and active for the work of the Lord. Thus the Lord works in setting us to work. Therefore think—determine—turn—“make haste and delay not;” and we wish you “God speed;” “we bless you in the name of the Lord.”‡

A word to the believer—Have you any doubts to clear up, any peace to regain in the ways of the Lord? “Make haste” to set your heart to the work. Much of the blessings of conviction, and much of the comfortable sense of acceptance, is lost by delay. Much of the freedom of the Lord’s service is sacrificed to sloth and procrastination. The work that is hard to-day, will be harder still to-morrow, by the resistance of this day’s convictions. A greater cost of self-denial, a heavier burden of sorrow and increasing unfitness for the service of God, will be the issue of delay. Be continually therefore looking for some beam of light to descend, and some influence of grace to flow in upon your souls, and you shall “not be disappointed of your hope.” The love, delight, rejoicing in the Lord, readiness to do and cheerfulness to suffer in the ways of God—these blessed consolations are the “hundred fold”§ which the Saviour has promised as an abundant compensation for all our trials for his sake, and which in the immediate actings of an exercised and vigorous faith will be richly enjoyed.

61. I AM A COMPANION OF ALL THEM THAT FEAR THEE, AND OF THEM THAT KEEP THY PRECEPTS.

Few of us, perhaps, have been literally exposed to the trials to which David here refers, such as “the hands of robbers;”|| but the lesson to be learnt from his frame of mind under this calamity is of great importance to all who profess to have their “treasure in heaven.” It teaches us, that only

* 2 Tim. i. 6. † Mark iii. 5. ‡ Psalm cxxix. 8. § Matt. xix. 29. || 1 Sam. xxx. 1—3.

exercised faith will support us to bear worldly loss with composure. And this faith will enable us instantly to recollect our heavenly portion, and to assure our interest in it, in a remembrance of the law of our God. Had David, in this exercise of faith, “forgotten God’s law,” no other resource of comfort opened before him. But it was ready—substantiating to his mind “the things that were not seen and eternal.”* Shall we seek a New Testament example bearing upon this point, and teaching us not only how to bear losses, but even how to forget them in the enjoyment of a better portion? See the estimate which St. Paul deliberately made upon this very trial: “Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord, *for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ.*”† The temper of mind under such trials as this, serves indeed most clearly to discover the real bent of the heart. If we are in possession of a spiritual and heavenly portion, we shall bear to be “robbed by the bands of the wicked,” and yet “hold fast our profession.” David, under this calamity, “encouraged himself in the Lord his God.”‡ Job, under the same visitation, “fell down upon the ground and worshipped.”§ The mercies, indeed, we lose are but as a feather, compared with the mercies which we retain. If we are robbed of our all, there is little danger of loss in the end—“The Lord gave Job *twice as much as he had before, and blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning.*”|| Thus, the early Christians suffered “the bands of the wicked to rob them.”—“They took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, *knowing in themselves that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance.*”¶ We have indeed little reason to be frightened from religion by the anticipation of the trouble to which it may expose us. In making exchange of the world for God, and the services of sin for the ways of heaven, we shall find no room left for regret in life, in death, or in eternity. The darkest hour of the believer is ten thousand times brighter than the brightest day of the ungodly. The prospect of the crown will enable us to bear the cross, and to realize its sanctifying support as a matter

* 2 Cor. iv. 18. Heb. xi. 1. † Phil. iii. 8. ‡ 1 Sam. xxx. 6. § Job i. 13—17, 20. || Job xlii. 10—12. ¶ Heb. x. 34.

for unbounded praise. But there are those to be found in a world of trouble, utterly ignorant of the all-sufficiency of the gospel refuge; and who, instead of being driven to it by the gracious visitations of their heavenly Father, are ready to retreat into any hiding-place of their own, rather than direct their steps backward to God. Pitiably and desolate as their circumstances of distress must be, surely they are most intensely aggravated by the sullen rebellion of heart, which refuses to listen to those breathings of love, that would guide them to the Saviour of sinners, as their sure, and peaceful and eternal rest!* Would that we could persuade them to cast their souls in penitence and faith before his blessed cross!† The burden of sin, as Bunyan's pilgrim found, would then drop from his back. And this burden once removed—other burdens, before intolerable, would be found comparatively light. Nay, even these lighter burdens would be removed in the enjoyment of the Christian privilege of casting all—sin—care—and trouble—upon Jesus. Contrast the state of destitution without him, with the abundant resources of the people of God. They are in the present possession of a “joy which no man taketh from them;”‡ and they have “laid up treasure in heaven,” “where the bands of the wicked can never break through nor steal.”§ Christian, does not your faith realize a substance in things not seen? The only realities in the apprehension of the world are “the things that are seen and are temporal.” Your realities are “the things that are not seen and are eternal.” Then remember, if you be robbed of your earthly all, your treasure is beyond the reach of harm. You still are able to say—“I have all and abound.”|| You can live splendidly upon your God, though all is beggary around you. The remembrance of the law of your God, is an unfailing stay to your exercised soul, and you are ready to acknowledge—“Unless thy law had been my delight, I should then have perished in my affliction.”¶

62. AT MIDNIGHT I WILL RISE TO GIVE THANKS UNTO THEE,
BECAUSE OF THY RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENTS.

THERE was no occasion for the painful restrictions and mortifications of a monastery to oblige this holy man to se-

* See Matt. xi. 23. † 1 Peter v. 7. ‡ John xvi. 22. § Matt. vi. 20. || Phil. iv. 18, also 2 Cor. vi. 10. ¶ Verse 92.

vere and self-denying observances. Much less was there any desire, by these extraordinary services, to work out a righteousness of his own, to recommend him to the favour of God. His diligence in this heavenly employment was the spontaneous effusion of a heart "filled with the Spirit."* It appears to have been his custom to beguile the quiet season of the night with a review of the goodness of his God, manifested in the several occurrences of the day, that his soul might be habitually awakened to the gratitude of a glowing heart.† What a useful example for our imitation! and what a sweet employment for the "wearisome nights," when the child of sorrow "is full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day."‡ Often should we then understand the suitableness of the exhortation—"Let the saints be joyful in glory—let them sing aloud upon their beds."§ Let us look at another picture of Christian enjoyment, under similar circumstances—"At *midnight*, Paul and Silas prayed and *sang praises to God*,"||—they gave thanks, because of his righteous judgments. We are often led to complain of our want of spirituality in the divine life—how much our body hinders the ascent of the soul heavenwards—how often in our evening retirements for communion with our God, we are overcome by drowsiness, and the "weakness of the flesh" overpowers the "willingness of the spirit."¶ But, after all due allowances made for constitutional infirmity, it may be well to inquire, how far we are "instant in season and out of season" in the mortification of the flesh.** Do we earnestly seek for a heart delighting in heavenly things? The more the flesh is denied for the service of God, the more we shall be elevated for the enjoyment, and realize the privilege, of the work; and instead of having so often to mourn that our "souls cleave unto the dust,"†† we shall be able to "mount upwards with eagles' wings?"‡‡ with a vigour peculiarly our own—and even now by anticipation, to take our place before "the throne of God and the Lamb." And need we remark the important influence of such exercises of self-denial and active exertion in promoting our own comfort, in strengthening and multiplying the evidences of our in-

* Eph. v. 18. † See Psalm cxxxix. 17, 18. ‡ Job vii. 3, 4. § Psalm cxlix. 5.
 || Acts xvi. 25. ¶ Matt. xxvi. 41. ** 1 Cor. ix. 27. †† Verse 25. ‡‡ Isaiah
 xl. 31.

terest in the Saviour's everlasting love? Oh! how much more fervent would our prayers be, were they enlivened with more abundant delight in the 'angelical work of praise!'"* And how much more should we have to speak of answers to prayer! Midnight would soon be turned to day, were it employed in the grateful recollection of the judgments of God. Lord, tune my heart to thy praise, and then no time will be unseasonable for this blessed employment. Time that is redeemed from sleep will be an antepast of the heavenly service.

63. I AM A COMPANION OF ALL THEM THAT FEAR THEE, AND OF THEM THAT KEEP THY PRECEPTS.

THOSE "that fear the Lord" will ever be identified with "those who keep his precepts,"† as the child testifies his filial fear by cheerful and implicit obedience to his father's will. They are then the Lord's people, and union with the Lord will naturally form a bond of union with them. Their identity of taste and pursuits will bind them to each other with a cord of love and fellowship, that "is not quickly broken."‡ Perhaps, however, here the Christian may be occasionally called to the exercise of self-denial, and to some sacrifice of his own taste and inclination. The society of his own sphere may be of a more refined and intelligent character, and more accordant to the cast of his own mind. But will he not, or ought he not to say—"Surely the fear of God is not in this place:"§ and "should I love those that hate the Lord?"|| It would be well that Christians, living in close, and to a certain degree necessary, contact with the world, should subject their hearts to an evening scrutiny on this subject—"Have I felt fellowship of spirit¶ with the world to-day? Has the society of this day refreshed my soul? Has it raised my heart to spiritual things? Has it exercised a watchful temper? Or has it not rather "quenched the Spirit" of prayer, and thrown me back from communion with God?" In the duties of our profession, or by the leadings of a gracious Providence, we are indeed brought into unavoidable connexion with those, who "have no fear of God before their eyes." Nor are we called to affect a sullen si-

* Baxter. † Compare Psalm ciii. 17, 18. ‡ Eccles. iv. 12. § Gen. xx. 11. || 2 Chron. xix. 2. ¶ 2 Cor. vi. 14, 15.

lence or to violate the rules of courtesy* in our attempts to force religion upon their attention. But such men, whatever be their attractions, will not be the companions of our choice. To feel fellowship with them, is to "remove the ancient land-mark,"† to forget the broad line of separation between us and them, and to venture into the atmosphere of most imminent danger. If indeed our hearts were ascending, like a flame of fire with a natural motion heavenwards, and carrying with them all in their way, it would be a matter of little importance to ourselves, who might be the companions of our walk. But so deadening to the spiritual part of our constitution is the conversation of the men of this world, however commanding their talents, or however interesting their topics, that even if we have just returned from seeking communion with God, and have felt our hearts sensibly enlivened with the contemplation of "things above," the free and self-indulgent interchange of their society will benumb our spiritual sensations, and quickly freeze them again. Evidently, therefore, it is not only incurring a most awful responsibility in the sight of God, but also a most serious hazard to our own souls, to underrate the high privilege of association with "them that fear God." If then we are not ashamed to become Christians, let us not shrink from walking in fellowship with Christians. Even if there should be some repulsive features of character with them, they bear the image of him whom we profess to love, inexpressibly and incomparably above all. They will be our companions in an eternal home: they ought therefore to be our brothers now. How sweet, and holy, and heavenly, is this near relation to them in our common Lord! Well may we consent to his judgment, who pronounced "the righteous to be more excellent than his neighbour,"‡ since those who have tasted the benefit of Christian communion have found it beyond all price. "Iron sharpeneth iron."§ If then "the iron be blunt," this will be one of the best means of "whetting the edge."|| The most established Christians have not been backward to acknowledge the sensible refreshment derived from this union of heart.¶ Nor can we forget, that it is

* See 1 Peter iii. 8. † Prov. xxii. 28. ‡ Prov. xii. 26. § Prov. xxvii. 17.
 || See Eccl. x. 10. ¶ Comp. Acts xxviii. 15. Rom. i. 11, 12. 2 Cor. vii. 6, 7.

marked in the word of God as one of the channels of the communication of heavenly wisdom*—as a feature in the character of the citizens of Zion†—and as that disposition which is distinguished with manifest tokens of the Saviour's presence,‡ and will finally be crowned with the special seal of remembrance at the great day—"They *that feared the Lord*, spake often one to another, and the Lord *hearkened and heard*" it, "and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they *shall be mine*, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels."§

64. THE EARTH, O LORD, IS FULL OF THY MERCY: TEACH ME
THY STATUTES.

WHAT a picture does the earth present on every side—"full of the mercy of the Lord!" How refreshing is the prospect to a spiritual eye! What an excitement to praise! "O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all. The earth is full of thy riches. The eyes of all wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand and satisfiest the desire of every living thing."|| And what an encouragement does the contemplation of the Lord's mercy in providence afford to the exercise of faith in the expectancy of spiritual privileges—"O Lord! thou preservest man and beast. How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God! *therefore* the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wing. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house, and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures."¶ 'As thou dost largely bestow thy blessings upon all creatures according to their nature and condition, so I do desire the spiritual blessings of the lively light of thy law and word, which are fitting and convenient for the being and happiness of my soul.'**

* Prov. xiii. 20. † Psalm xv. 1, 4. Comp. Psalm xvi. 3, and especially 1 John iii. 14. ‡ Luke xxiv. 15, 32. § Mal. iii. 16, 17. || Psalm civ. 24; cxlv. 15, 16. ¶ Psalm xxxvi. 6, 7.

** Diodati. 'It is worthy of special notice, how often, and in what varied connexions, David in this Psalm prays to be taught the statutes of God, though he seems to have been more intimately acquainted with the sacred oracles, as then extant, than almost any other man; but he knew that divine teaching alone could enable him rightly to understand the Scriptures, and to apply general rules to all the variety of particular cases which occurred in the course of his life.'—*Scott*.

As an ignorant sinner,—“what I see not, teach thou me.”* “Teach me thy statutes”—that which thou hast appointed as the way of duty, and the path to glory—that path which I am utterly unable to discover, or when discovered, to walk in, without the help of thy grace. And indeed the hearts of his people are the vessels, into which the Lord is continually pouring more and more of himself, until they shall “be filled with all the fulness of God.”† Every good, according to its character and degree, is diffusive. And thus the goodness or mercy of God is represented as pervading the whole universe of his creation, and more especially filling the hearts of his people. It is natural—plentiful—free—communicative.‡ Yet none but a believer will understand how to use the plea which is here employed. The mercy that he sees on every side, is to him a pledge and earnest of that mercy which his soul needs within. The world indeed, in its present fallen state, when seen through the medium of pride and discontent, exhibits a picture of misery, not of mercy, and only ministers occasion for complaint against the Creator. But the believer, feeling the infinite and eternal desert of sin—cannot but know that the lowest exercise of goodness in God is an act of free undeserved mercy. No wonder then that he sees mercy in every thing—in every part of the universe of God—a world “full of mercy.” The very food we eat, our raiment, our habitations, the contrivances for our comfort, are not mere displays of goodness, but manifestations of mercy. Having forfeited all claim upon the smallest consideration of God, there could have been no just ground of complaint, had all these blessings been made occasions of suffering instead of comfort and indulgence. And then the question naturally recurs, and to a spiritual mind will never weary by its recurrence—Whence flows all this mercy? Oh! it is delightful indeed to answer such an inquiry—delightful to contemplate him, “in whom” we are not only “blessed with all spiritual blessings,”§ but who is also the medium through which our temporal comforts are conveyed to us. How sweet to eye these mercies, as bought with the most precious blood that ever was known in the world, and to mark the print of the nails of our crucified Friend stamped upon the least of them! We allow

* Job xxxiv. 32.

† Eph. iii. 19.

‡ Verse 681

§ Eph. i. 3.

it to add a relish to our enjoyments, that we can consider them as provided by some beloved friend: and should not our mercies be doubly sweet in the remembrance of that munificent Friend, who purchased them for us so dearly, who bestows them upon us so richly, yea, who gives himself with them all? But have we heard of this mercy of God? And do we feel the need of it for ourselves—for every moment? Then let us apply to the throne of grace in the gospel way of acceptance and access. Let us go to the King (as Benhadad's servants to the king of Israel)* in the spirit of self-condemnation and faith. Our acceptance does not depend (as in the case referred to) upon a "peradventure;" but it rests upon the sure word of promise—"Him that cometh to me, *I will in no wise cast out.*"†

PART IX.

65. THOU HAST DEALT WELL WITH THY SERVANT, O LORD, ACCORDING UNTO THY WORD.

PERHAPS David is here acknowledging the Lord's answer to his prayer—"Deal bountifully with thy servant."‡ "Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according unto thy word." And who is there among us that has not daily reason to make the same acknowledgment? Even in those trials, when we have almost been disposed to suspect the Lord of his dealing hardly with us, a clearer view of his judgments, and a more simple dependence upon his faithfulness and love, will rebuke our impatience and unbelief, and encourage our trust in God.§ Probably subsequent experience altered the hasty view that Jacob had been led to take of the Lord's dealings with him. In a

* Compare 1 Kings xx. 31.

† John vi. 37.

‡ Verse 17.

§ 'If all the sad losses, trials, sicknesses, infirmities, griefs, heaviness, and inconstancy of the creature be expounded to be, as I am sure they are, the rods of the jealousy of a Father in heaven, contending with all your lovers on earth, though there were millions of them, for your love, to fetch it home to heaven, single, unmixed, you will forgive, (if we may use that word) every rod of God, and "not let the sun go down upon your wrath" against any messenger of your afflicting and correcting Father.'—Rutherford's Letters.

moment of peevishness, the recollection of the supposed death of a beloved son, and the threatened bereavement of another, tempted him to say—“*All these things are against me.*”* At a brighter period of his day, when clouds were beginning to disperse, we hear that the spirit of Jacob *revived*—“And Jacob said, *It is enough*; Joseph my son is yet alive; I will go and see him before I die.”† And when his evening sun was going down almost without a cloud, he was ready with a yet more clear acknowledgment of the faithfulness of his gracious God—“By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph.”‡ And what had he then to say, but to retract the language of his former sinful impatience? “God, before whom my fathers, Abraham and Isaac, did walk, the God which fed me all my life long, unto this day, *the Angel which redeemed me from all evil*, bless the lads.”§ This surely was in the true spirit of the acknowledgment—“Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word.”—And how is it that any of us have ever harboured a suspicion of unbelief? Has God in any one instance falsified his promise? Has the vision failed to come at the end? Has it ever “*lied?*”|| Has he not “confirmed his promise by an oath,” so that we might have “two immutable things” as the ground of “*strong consolation?*”¶ If we have faith and patience to wait, “in the mount of the Lord it shall be seen.”** “All things,” may at some seasons of our experience “seem to be against us,” at the very time when under the wonder-working hand of God they are “working together for our good.”†† When we “are in heaviness through manifold temptations,” and we discover a “needs be” for it all, and “the trial of faith is found unto praise, and honour, and glory,”‡‡—have we not cause to say—“Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord?” And when we begin to reap “the peaceable fruits of righteousness,”§§ from the discipline of our Father’s school, have we not cause to repeat the acknowledgment? But indeed we must say, that this is an acknowledgment, which the believer ought to make under every circumstance, however afflictive.|||| Why not in the very midst of “heaviness?”

* Gen. xlii. 36. † Gen. xlv. 27, 28. ‡ Heb. xi. 21. § Gen. xlviii. 15, 16. || Hab. ii. 3. ¶ Heb. vi. 17, 18. ** Gen. xxii. 14. See Scott in loco. †† Rom. viii. 28. ‡‡ 1 Pet. i. 6, 7. §§ Heb. xii. 11.

|||| Verses 71, 75. In every thing (therefore including affliction) by prayer and supplication, *with thanksgiving*, &c. Phil. iv. 6. Comp. also Thess. v. 18.

Why must he wait till he come out of it, to own the loving-kindness of his God? This would surely be to “glorify God in the fires.”* This is surely what faith in actual exercise has enabled many, and will enable him, to do. This is to trust him, when “walking in darkness and having no light.”† But if he doubts the reasonableness of this acknowledgment under such circumstances, let him endeavour to take up language of a different character. Let him, when suffering under trial, attempt to say—‘Lord, thou hast dealt ill with thy servant, thou hast not kept thy word.’ If in a moment of unbelief his impatient heart, like Jacob’s, could harbour such a dishonourable suspicion, his conscience would soon smite him with conviction, and send him to his own bosom to mourn over his distrust—What! shall I—who am “called out of darkness into marvellous light”—shall I, who am rescued from slavery and death, and brought into a glorious state of liberty and life, complain? Shall I, who have been redeemed at so great a price, and who have a right to “all the promises of God in Christ Jesus,”‡ and who am now an “heir of God and joint-heir with Christ,”§ murmur at my Father’s will? Alas that my heart should prove so foolish—so weak—so ungrateful! Lord! I would acknowledge with thankfulness, and yet with humiliation—“Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, according to thy word.” But if these acknowledgments are honourable to God, and supporting to our own faith, how many sweet occasions of calling to mind the Lord’s mercies are lost by our own neglect! Were we habitually to mark them for future remembrance, we should be surprised to see how their numbers would multiply, till we were ready to say—If I should count them, “they are more in number than the sand.”|| And truly such recollections would come up as a sweet savour to God “by Christ Jesus,”¶ while they would serve to enhance every common, as well as every special mercy, which we receive from his bounty—“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and *all that is within me* bless his holy name, and forget not all his benefits.”**

* Isa. xxiv. 15. † Isa. i. 10. ‡ 2 Cor. i. 20. § Rom. viii. 17. || Ps. cxxxix. 18. ¶ Heb. xiii. 15. ** Psalm ciii. 1, 2.

66. TEACH ME GOOD JUDGMENT AND KNOWLEDGE; FOR I HAVE BELIEVED THY COMMANDMENTS.

MAY not this prayer and plea of David afford some instruction in the nature of the principle of faith, that it is ever ready to take God's word implicitly upon his own credit, and that its active exercise never fails to lead to supplication for divine instruction? Indeed, the recollections just brought to mind of the Lord's faithful and gracious dealings with his people, will always supply encouragement and excitement to prayer for blessings suitable to our wants. And nothing is there that we stand in more need of, than "good judgment and knowledge"—"knowledge" of ourselves, of our Saviour, of the way of obedience,—and "good judgment" to direct and apply this knowledge to some valuable end. These two parts of our intellectual furniture have a most important connexion and dependence upon each other. "Knowledge" is the speculative perception of general truth. "Judgment" is the practical application of it to the heart and conduct. No school, but the school of Christ—no teaching, but the teaching of the Spirit, can ever give "this good judgment and knowledge." Solomon asks it for himself,*—Paul for his people.† Both direct us to God as the sole fountain and author of these precious gifts.‡ Much indeed do we need these blessings in the study of the word of God. In a field of such vast extent we should not satisfy ourselves with a narrow compass, but should be grasping a distinct and extended survey of those truths, which are so intimately connected with our way of acceptance and walk

* 1 Kings iii. 9. † Phil. i. 9, 10. Col. i. 9.

‡ Prov. ii. 6. 1 Cor. i. 5. 2 Tim. i. 7. It is recorded of one of the Reformers, that when he had acquitted himself in a public disputation with great credit to his Master's cause, a friend begged to see the notes, which he had been observed to write, supposing that he had taken down the arguments of his opponents and sketched the substance of his own reply—Greatly was he surprised to find that his notes consisted simply of these ejaculatory petitions—'More light, Lord,—more light,—more light!' And how fully was the true spirit of prayer compressed and illustrated in these short aspirations? Could they fail of success? "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it *shall be given him*." James i. 5. Greenham being asked his judgment of some important matters,—answered—'Sir, neither am I able to speak, nor you to hear, *for we have not prayed*. I may indeed talk, and you may answer as natural men; but *we are not now prepared to confer as children of God*.'—Works, p. 19.

before God. From the want of an accurate and enlarged view of Bible truth, arise many of those doubts, discouragements, and fears, that perplex the minds of sincere Christians—many of their mistaken apprehensions of important doctrine—and much also of their coldness and backslidings of heart and conduct.

Perhaps the tender and sensitive child of God, could not utter a more suitable prayer than this. To a mind cast into this frame, a scrupulous conscience is one of the most active and successful enemies to his established peace and quietness. The faculty of conscience partakes with every other power of man of the injury of the fall, and therefore with all its intelligence, and honesty, and power, is liable to misconception. It is often perplexed about matters of trivial moment,* and led to pronounce its verdict† more upon the impulse of feeling than from the exercise of judgment; more from an indistinct perception of the subject presented to the mind, than from a simple immediate reference to the law and testimony. As therefore the pleasure and the pain which it causes may be founded upon mistake, and consequently the result may be groundless apprehension or false security, it is evident that it cannot be trusted without the light of the word of God. Hence the importance of the prayer—"Teach me good judgment and knowledge." The exercises of this state of feeling are both endless and causeless. In the well-intended endeavour to guard against a devious track, the mind is constantly harassed with an over-anxious inquiry whether the right path is accurately discovered, and thus at once the pleasure and the progress of the journey is materially hindered. The influence therefore of this morbid sensibility is strenuously to be resisted. It renders the straight way more straight. It retards the work of grace in the soul. It damps our cheerfulness in our Master's service, and unfits us for the duty of the present moment. What, however, is more than all to be deprecated, is, that it multiplies sin; or, to speak more clearly, it superinduces another species of sin, besides the actual transgression of the law of God. For opposition to the dictates of conscience, in any particular, is sin, even though the act itself may be allowed by the law of God. We may therefore sin in the act of doing good, or in obedience to the liberty and enjoyment of the gospel, as well as in the

* Col. ii. 16. † 1 Cor. viii. 4, 7.

allowed transgression of the sacred law. Indeed, under the bondage of a scrupulous conscience, we seem to be entangled in the sad necessity of sinning. The dictates of conscience, even when grounded upon misconception are authoritative. Listening to its suggestions may be sinning against the liberty wherewith Christ has made us “free,” and in which we are commanded to “stand fast.”* Resistance to its voice is disobedience to God’s vicegerent, and, therefore, in a qualified sense, at least, disobedience to God himself. And thus sin is committed, even when that which conscience condemns may be innocent.†

The importance of this case in its connexion with Christian communion may justify a yet more extended consideration of it. The evil may be traced in some instances to a diseased temperament of body, to a naturally weak understanding, or to the unfavourable influence of early prejudice. The faith, though weak, is sincere, and the sin such as it is, is a sin of infirmity, calling for our pity, forbearance, prayer, and help. In a majority of instances, however, wilful ignorance, false shame that will not inquire, or an obstinate and pertinacious adherence to deep-rooted opinion, is the source of the disease. Now such persons must be roused, even though the attempt to rouse them should be attended with the hazard of wounding the conscience of the more tenderly scrupulous. But as the one class decidedly sin, and the other too frequently indulge their infirmity, the excitement will probably not be without its ultimate benefit to both. We would suggest, then, to both—How important is it to have the conscience enlightened!—to seek to have “a right judgment in all things,” by a more diligent “searching of the Scriptures”—by “seeking the law at the mouth of the priest”‡—and, above all, by earnest prayer with the Psalmist—“Teach me good judgment and knowledge.” If “whatsoever is not of faith is sin,” then the only prospects of the removal of the doubt will be increase of faith, to be sought and expected in the same way by which faith in its first acting came to the soul; “by hearing, and hearing by the word of God;”§ and though it may be true that “there is not in every one this knowledge,”||—yet the exhortation speaks alike to all—“Grow in

* Gal. v. 1. † Compare Rom. xiv. 20—23.

‡ Mal. ii. 7. See the example of the primitive church. Acts xv. 1, 2.

|| Rom. x. 17. § 1 Cor. viii. 7.

grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”* Indeed, we cannot altogether discharge the most favourable symptoms of scrupulosity (except where the disease originates in external causes,) from the guilt of wilful ignorance, because none can strictly be said sincerely to ask for “good judgment and knowledge,” who do not diligently improve all means of obtaining it. If, therefore, the scrupulous shrink from honestly seeking the resolution of their difficulties in private conferences (where they are to be had) with ministers or more experienced Christians than themselves, so far they must be considered as wilfully ignorant. We know our duty—to “bear with their infirmities;”† but we know also, that, hard as their bondage is, no other relief can be expected but in the way of increased diligence, humility, and prayer. If, therefore, there be any hesitation concerning the path of duty, let us wait, inquire, and pray until our way be made plain. Having done this, we must act according to our conscience, allowing nothing that it condemns, neglecting nothing which it requires. The responsibility of error (should error be eventually detected) will not be—the too implicit following of the guidance of conscience—but the want of due care and diligence for its more clear illumination. Generally, however, the rule will apply—“If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.”‡

But, besides the case of a scrupulous conscience, another case, equally to be deprecated, presents itself in the exercise of the imperfectly enlightened conscience. Often does it charge the incessant variations of frame to a sinful source, when they have really originated in bodily indisposition or accidental influence of temptation. Sins of infirmity are confounded with sins of indulgence; occasional with habitual transgressions of duty. Only a part of the character is brought under cognizance, and while shortcomings or surprisals are justly condemned, yet actings of contrition, faith, love, and watchfulness, are passed by unnoticed! and thus, by the influence of this imperfectly enlightened conscience, the gospel becomes the very reverse of the appointment of its gracious Author§—bringing ashes for beauty, mourning for the oil of joy, and the spirit of

* 2 Peter iii. 18. † Rom. xiv. 1, xv. 1.

‡ Matt. vi. 22. Comp. Prov. xxiv. 5. For a similar view of this see, see Baxter's Christian Directory, b. i. c. iii. § Comp. I lxi. 3.

heaviness for the garment of praise. If this evil is "not a sin unto death," "it is a sore evil under the sun," which may often give occasion for the prayer—"Teach me good judgment and knowledge," that, in the path of simplicity of faith, I may be blessed with a tender conscience, and be delivered from the bondage of a scrupulous, and from the perplexity of an unenlightened conscience. Let my heart never condemn me where it ought not. Let it never fail to condemn me where it ought.

Alas! how does our indistinct perception of the blessing of this "good judgment and knowledge," restrain our prayer for the light of the Spirit of God! The loveliness, glory, and heavenly character of this light is what the natural "eye hath not seen, and cannot see." Let us cry for this with deeper earnestness, and more patient waiting upon God. Its blessed influence flows unceasingly in increasing knowledge and judgment. It is a treasury which does not spend by giving. Here we may ask to the utmost extent of our wants, and "with full assurance of faith." But this faith is the principle of gospel obedience. Walking therefore in—"the obedience of faith"—"believing God's commandment," as well as his promises, convinced of their perfection, acknowledging their obligation, loving them and living in them, we shall "come to full age" in the knowledge of the gospel, and "by reason of use have our senses exercised to discern good and evil."*

**67. BEFORE I WAS AFFLICTED I WENT ASTRAY; BUT NOW HAVE
I KEPT THY WORD.**

THE seductive temptation of a prosperous state, and the too successful hinderances which it offers to the progress of the life of God in the soul, render the condition of the gay and thoughtless among us far more to be dreaded than to be envied. Should the Christian ever, by the appointment of God, be thrown into this atmosphere of danger, he will feel the prayer that is so often put into his lips most peculiarly expressive of his need—"In all time of our wealth—Good Lord! deliver us!"† A time of wealth is indeed a time of especial need—so much is there in such a season to give power to Satan's temptations, and at the

* Heb. v. 14. † Litany.

same time to weaken our perceptions of their power. Many and afflicting are the instances recorded of its baneful influence on the Lord's people*—while its unmitigated curse in the experience of the ungodly is written as with a sun-beam for our warning—"When Jeshurun waxed fat he kicked. I spake unto thee in thy prosperity, but thou saidst, I will not hear."† But how awful will be the period, when the question shall speak to the conscience with all the poignancy of self-conviction—"What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed?" What is the end of this flowery path? "Death!"‡ "Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castest them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors!"§ "The prosperity of fools shall destroy them."|| We cannot therefore forbear to mark the combined wisdom and love manifested in our Saviour's allotment for his people—"In the world ye shall have tribulation!"¶ This is the gracious rod by which he scourges back his prodigal children to himself. This is the fatherly discipline by which he preserves them from being poisoned with the sweetness of carnal allurements, and keeps their hearts in a simple direction towards himself, as the well-spring of their everlasting joy. With all of them this one method has been pursued. All have been exercised in one school. All have known the power of affliction in some of its varied forms of inward conflict or outward trouble, and the experience that has been derived from this source, has given abundant evidence that the pains have not been bestowed upon them in vain. "*Now*"—is each of them ready to say, "*Now* have I kept thy word." I never prized it before. I could indeed scarcely be said to know it. I never understood its comfort, until affliction expounded it to me. I never till now saw its suitableness to my case. Thus it was with Manasseh, "when in affliction he besought the Lord, and humbled himself greatly before the Lord God of his fathers."*** Thus also in affliction the Lord "heard Ephraim bemoaning himself."†† The same eye, under the

* The histories of David, 1 Chron. xxi. 1—4; Solomon, 1 Kings xi. 1—8; Uzziah, 2 Chron. xxvi. 16; and Hezekiah, 2 Chron. xxxii. 25—32, will readily occur to the mind.

† Deut. xxxii. 15. Jer. xix. 21. ‡ Rom. vi. 21. § Psalm lxxiii. 18, 19. || Prov. i. 32. ¶ John xvi. 33. Acts xiv. 22. *** 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12. Comp. Dan. iv. 36, 37. †† Jer. xxxi. 18, 19.

same circumstances, now beheld Israel "seeking him early,"* and the forlorn wandering child casting a wishful penitent look towards his Father's house, as if the sinful pleasures that had enticed his heart from home were now imbittered to his soul.†

But what a heightened aggravation of guilt, when these special and choicest mercies fail of their gracious end—when vanity, worldliness, and sin are reigning as before with uncontrolled sway! Ah! when sinners are unhumiliated "under the mighty hand of God"—when it is said of them—"They received not correction,"‡ it seems to be the forerunner of that tremendous judgment—"Why should ye be stricken any more?"§

Heavenly Father! keep thy poor weak erring child from this fearful doom. Let not that measure of prosperity, which thou mayest be pleased to vouchsafe, prove my curse. But especially let every cross, every affliction which thou art pleased to mingle in my cup, conform me more to my Saviour's image, restrain my heart from its daily wanderings, endear thy holy ways and word to my soul, and give me sweeter anticipations of that blessed home, where I shall never wander more, but find my eternal happiness in "keeping thy word."

68. THOU ART GOOD, AND DOEST GOOD; TEACH ME THY
STATUTES.

THE blessed effects of chastisement, as a special instance of the Lord's goodness, might naturally lead to an acknowledgment of his general goodness, in his own character, and in his unwearied dispensation of love. Judging in unbelieving haste of his providential and gracious dealings, feeble sense imagines a frown, when the eye of sense discerns a smile upon his face; and therefore in proportion as faith is exercised in the review of the past, and the experience of the present, we shall be prepared with the ascription of praise—"Thou art good." This is the true and genuine character of God. He is good—He is goodness. Good in himself—good in the essence—good in the highest degree. All the names of God are comprehended in this one of "Good."|| "All the acts of God are nothing else

* Hos. v. 15; vi. 1, 2. † Luke xv. 16, 17. ‡ Zeph. iii. 2. § Isa. i. 5.
|| The revelation of the "goodness" of God was made to Moses in direct an-

but the effluxes of his goodness, distinguished by several names according to the object it is exercised about. When he confers happiness without merit, it is grace. When he bestows happiness against merit, it is mercy. When he bears with provoking rebels, it is long-suffering. When he performs his promise, it is truth. When he commiserates a distressed person, it is pity. When he supplies an indigent person, it is bounty. When he succours an innocent person, it is righteousness. And when he pardons a penitent person, it is mercy. All summed up in this one name of Goodness. None so communicatively good as God. As the notion of God includes goodness, so the notion of goodness includes diffusiveness. Without goodness he would cease to be a Deity, and without diffusiveness he would cease to be good. The being good is necessary to the being God. For goodness is nothing else in the notion of it but a strong inclination to do good; either to find or to make an object wherein to exercise itself, according to the propension of its own nature. And it is an inclination of communicating itself, not for its own interest, but for the good of the object it pitcheth upon. Thus God is good by nature, and his nature is not without activity. He acts conveniently with his own nature. "Thou art good, and doest good."* How easily an acknowledgment of this kind is excited towards an earthly friend! Yet who has not daily cause to complain of the coldness and languor of his affections towards our God! It would be a sweet morning's reflection to recollect some of the innumerable instances in which the goodness of God has been most distinctly marked, to trace them in their peculiar application to our own need, and above all to mark, not only the source from which they come, but the channel through which they flow. A view of covenant love does indeed make the goodness of God to shine with inexpressible brightness

swer to his prayer—"I beseech thee, show me thy glory"—evidently marking his "goodness" to be not a single attribute, or a display of any particular feature of the Divine character, but rather to consist in the combined exercise of all his perfections. *Exod. xxxiii. 18, 19, with xxxiv. 5—7.*

* Charnocke's Works, vol. i. 581, 585, 588. 'For another exquisite view (parallel and in some particulars identical with Charnocke,) of this perfecting perfection, which crowns and consummates all the rest'—see *Howe's Works*, 8vo. edit. 1822, viii. pp. 107—114.

“in the face of Jesus Christ,”* and often, when the heart is conscious of backsliding, does the contemplation of this “goodness,” under the influence of the Spirit, prove the divinely appointed means of “leading us to repentance.”†

But praise will always give encouragement to prayer. “Thou art good, and doest good.” Then give me the good I need—Give me this instance of thy goodness—“Teach me thy statutes.” Thus should our views of Divine goodness establish our habit of dependence upon the Lord for every needful blessing, and among the rest for the blessing of Divine teaching, which indeed is connected with this feature of the Divine character.‡ Twice before had the Psalmist sent up this prayer and plea.§ Yet, though probably the carnal taste may be weary of the repetition, he seems to make the supplication ever new by the freshness and vehemency of his desires. And let me ever make it new by the remembrance of that one display of goodness which casts every other manifestation into the shade, constituting of itself an entire and complete mirror of infinite and everlasting goodness—“God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son.”|| What can I say to this—but “Thou art good, and doest good,” what may I not then expect from thee? “Teach me thy statutes”—Teach me the revelation of thyself—teach me the knowledge of thy Son. For “this is life eternal, that I might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”¶

69. THE PROUD HAVE FORGED A LIE AGAINST ME, BUT I WILL
KEEP THY PRECEPTS WITH MY WHOLE HEART.

HE, who “is a liar and the father of it,”**—how readily, does he put it into the hearts of his children to “forge lies against” the children of God. But all is overruled by the ever-watchful care and providence of God for the eventual good of his church. Thus the sincere are frightened by the cross, and removed out of the way, while by this exercise of faith, the graces of his own people are strengthened. No principle, however, but faith can enable us to stand the

* 2 Cor. iv. 6. † Rom. ii. 4. ‡ Psalm xxv. 8. § Verses 12, 64. || John iii. 16. ¶ John xvii. 3. ** Ib. viii. 44.

hour of trial, though convinced that they are only “lies” that “are forged against us.” The eye must be taken off from the objects of sense, and fixed steadily on Jesus, in order that we may see things in their true light. And perhaps one fault in our daily religion, and a source of much discomfort in our experience, may be traced to a neglect of eyeing the Saviour’s example as our pattern and encouragement. For what circumstance is there of difficulty and trial, in which we do not enjoy the high honour and privilege, of being conformed to his suffering image, and in which therefore his life and daily sorrows and tribulations, will not supply equal directions and support? Do “they forge lies against us?” So did they against him*—“The disciple is not above his Master, nor the servant above his Lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his Master, and the servant as his Lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household.”† The exhortation, therefore, of the apostles speaks to this case—“Consider him, *that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your mind.*”‡—But is it always “lies that are forged against us?” Is there no worldliness, or pride, or inconsistency in temper and walk, that opens the mouth of the enemies of the gospel, and causes “the way of truth to be evil spoken of?”§ Do they not sometimes “say all manner of evil against some of us, for Christ’s sake,” yet, alas! not altogether “falsely?”|| “Wo unto the world because of offences, for it must needs be that offences come; but wo to that man by whom the offence cometh.”¶ But if the reproach of the world be the reproach of the cross of Christ, “let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for he is faithful that promised.”** Insincerity of heart is one of the most powerful hinderances to a consistent and persevering endurance of the cross—a heart divided between God and the world will ever be found faulty and backsliding.†† Whereas wholeness of heart in the precepts of God adorns the Christian profession, awes the ungodly world, realizes the full extent of the Divine promises, and pours into the soul such a spring-tide of enjoyment, as more than counterbalances

* Compare Matt. xxvi. 59—61.

† Matt. x. 24, 25.

‡ Heb. xii. 3.

§ 2 Peter ii. 2. || See Matt. v. 11.

¶ Matt. xviii. 7.

** Heb. x. 23.

†† Compare Hos. x. 2. Jer. iii. 10.

all the reproach, contempt, and falsehood, which the forge of the great enemy is employing against us with such unceasing activity, and relentless hatred. Yet forget not, believer, that these proofs of the malicious enmity of the proud must often be received as the gentle stroke of your Father's chastisement. Let the fruits of it then be daily visible in the work of mortification—in the exercise of the suffering graces of the gospel of Christ—in your growing conformity to his image—and progressive meetness for a world of eternal uninterrupted love.

70. THEIR HEART IS AS FAT AS GREASE, BUT I DELIGHT IN THY LAW.

WHAT a fearful blow of Almighty justice is that which benumbs the sinner's heart, so that, though mountains of sin and guilt lie upon it, the pressure is unfelt? The heart is as if it were left of God, "seared with a hot iron,"* and therefore without tenderness, "past feeling,"† unsoftened by the touch and power of the word, unhumbled by the rod of providential dispensations, given up to the heaviest of all spiritual judgments! But it is of little avail by this benumbing influence to stifle the voice of conscience, unless the same power or device could annihilate hell. It will only "awake out of sleep, like a giant refreshed with wine,"‡ and rage with tenfold interminable fury in the eternal world on account of the temporary restraint, which for a short moment had benumbed its energy. Wilful resistance of the light of the gospel and the strivings of the Spirit has probably been the awful provocation that has constrained from a God of love the message of judicial abandonment—"Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert and be healed."§ Who then among us will not cry—"From hardness of heart, and contempt of thy word and commandments, good Lord! deliver us!"|| The first mark of the touch of grace, is when the heart becomes sensible of its own insensibility, and contrite on account of its own hardness. 'Nothing'—said Jerome in a letter to a friend—"makes my heart sadder, than

* 1 Tim. iv. 2. † Eph. iv. 18. ‡ Psalm lxxviii. 65. P. T. § Isa. vi. 9, 10. || Litany.

that nothing makes it sad.' But when "the plague of our own heart" begins to be known* and felt, and to become matter of confession, humiliation, and prayer, the promise of "a new," soft, and tender "heart," listening to conviction, speaks comfort and encouragement.† The heart that is the subject of this promise is led to take its "delight in God's law," and, amidst the sometimes overwhelming power of natural corruption, finds a satisfactory witness of a change "from death unto life."

Christian! Does not the contrast of this wretched condition with your own favoured state force from you an acknowledgment of praise to distinguishing grace? "Their heart is as fat as grease; *but I delight in thy law.*" What—Oh, "what shall I render to the Lord?"‡—prayer for them—gratitude for myself! But what is it that can put life, and feeling, and love, into a heart sunk and degraded in this state of stupefaction? "It is the Spirit that quickeneth."§ The vital breath, pulse, feeling, and motion, is the effect of influence from above; without which all is dead, all is death! "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live."||

Let us apply, for the purpose of daily self-examination, this description of the heart, as given up to its natural hardness and dulness, or cast into the gospel-mould of love and "delight in the law of God." Such an examination will prove to us how much even renewed souls need of the transforming, softening, influences of grace. "The deceitfulness of sin" spreads a hardness over the heart,¶ which, if left to itself, would soon revert to its original character—"as fat as grease"—unfeeling—incapable of impression without a divine touch. O Lord, let not my heart be unvisited for one day, one hour, by that melting energy of love which first made me feel, and constrained me to love.

71. IT IS GOOD FOR ME THAT I HAVE BEEN AFFLICTED; THAT
I MIGHT LEARN THY STATUTES.

IF I mark in myself any difference from the ungodly—if I can feel that the natural insensibility of my heart is yielding to the influence of grace—if I am enabled to "delight in God's law," which before I had neglected as a

* 1 Kings viii. 38. † Ezek. xxxvi. 26. ‡ Psalm cxv. 12. § John vi. 63.
|| Ezek. xxxvii. 9. ¶ Heb. iii. 13.

“strange thing,”* where and by what means has this change been produced? If “God has made my heart soft,”† which before was “as fat as grease,” the transformation has been wrought in the school of affliction; and therefore let me be ready to acknowledge—“It is good for me that I have been afflicted.” None indeed but the Lord’s scholars can know the blessing of this school, and this teaching. If any special lesson is to be taught, it will probably be learned there, for there it is that “he showeth us our work, he openeth also our ear to discipline.”‡ ‘I never,’ said Luther, ‘knew the meaning of God’s word, until I came into affliction. I have always found it one of my best schoolmasters.’§ Indeed it may be most truly said, that affliction explains many a hard text, and seals many a precious promise, so that we should miss much of the meaning and spiritual blessing of the word, if we were not more or less instructed in this school of affliction. For how can we have any experimental acquaintance with the promises of the word, except we are brought into those circumstances for which the promises are made? How, for example, could we understand the full mercy of such a gracious word—“Call upon me in the day of trouble—I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me”||—unless our condition were such as to remind us of our Lord’s declaration—“In the world ye shall have tribulation?”¶ When therefore we are led to pray for a clearer apprehension and interest in the contents of the blessed book, and for a deeper experience of its power upon our hearts, we are in fact often unconsciously supplicating for the chastening rod of our Father’s love. For it is the man “whom the Lord chasteneth,” that he “teacheth out of his law.”** Peter, indeed, when on the mount of transfigura-

* Hos. viii. 12. † Job xxiii. 16. ‡ Job xxxvi. 8—10.

§ On another occasion, referring to some spiritual temptation on the morning of the preceding day, he added to a friend, (Justin Jonas) ‘Doctor, I must mark the day, I was yesterday at school.’ Milner, v. 484. In one of his works, he most accurately calls affliction ‘the theology of Christians’—‘theologism Christianorum.’ To the same purport is the testimony of a learned French divine and tried saint of God—‘I have learned more divinity,’—said Dr. Rivet, confessing to God of his last days of affliction—‘in these ten days that thou art come to visit me, than I did in fifty years before. Thou hast brought me to myself. “Before I was afflicted I went astray,” and was in the world, but now I am conversant in the school of my God, and he teacheth me after another manner than all those doctors, in reading whom I spent so much time.’—Middleton’s Biog. Evan. iii. 238.

|| Psalm i. 15. ¶ John xvi. 33.

** Psalm xciv. 12. The use of the word *παιδεύω* in the acceptance of chas-

tion, said,—“It is good for us to be here. Let us build here three tabernacles.” Here let us abide in a state of comfort and indulgence, and perfect sunshine.’ But well was it added by the sacred historian—“Not knowing what he said.”* The judgment of David was far more correct, when he pronounced “that it was good for him that he had been afflicted.” For so often are we convicted of inattention to the voice of the Lord—so often do we find ourselves looking back upon forsaken Sodom, or lingering in the plains, instead of pressing onward to Zoar†—that the indulgence of our own liberty would shortly hurry us along the pathway of destruction. Alas! it is not seldom that we feel the spirit of prayer to be quenched for a season by the “overcharging of the heart with the cares of this life”‡—or by the overprizing of some lawful source of comfort— or by a temper inconsistent with our Christian profession— or by an undue confidence in the flesh. And at such seasons of backsliding, we must count among our choicest mercies, the gracious discipline by which the Lord schools us with the cross, “that we may learn his statutes.”

And are you, tried believer, disposed to regret the lessons you have already learned in this school, or to conceive that you have purchased them at too dear a cost? Do you grieve over the bleedings of a contrite heart, that have brought you under the care of the healing Physician? Or do you know any other way, by which you could have obtained so rich an experience of his love, or have been trained to such implicit obedience to his will? As Jesus, “though he were a Son, yet learned obedience by the things that he suffered,”§ so may we “rejoice, inasmuch as we are partakers of his sufferings,”|| and be thankful to learn the same obedience as the evidence and fruits of our conformity to him. The Lord save us from the greatest of all afflictions—an affliction lost!¶

“Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee, lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited.** He that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall

tening (LXX. in this verse, and Heb. xii. 5,) is remarkable, as describing literally the instruction by which a child is trained to the acquisition of useful knowledge; which, however, not being generally effected without chastening, accounts for the use of the word, as marking the discipline which usually attends instruction.

* Luke ix. 33. † Comp. Gen. xix. 17—22. ‡ Luke xxi. 34. § Heb. v. 8. || 1 Pet. iv. 13. ¶ Comp. 1 Kings xiii. 33. 2 Chron. xxviii. 22. ** Jer. vi. 8.

suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.”* A call to tremble and repent, to watch and pray, and “turn to him that smiteth us!”† Oh! is there one of that countless throng surrounding the everlasting throne, that is not ready with this song of praise—“It is good for me that I have been afflicted?”

“And one of the elders answered, saying unto me—What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and *whence came they?* And I said unto him—Sir, thou knowest. And he said unto me—These are they which *came out of great tribulation*, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”‡

72. THE LAW OF THY MOUTH IS BETTER UNTO ME THAN THOUSANDS OF GOLD AND SILVER.

WELL might David acknowledge the benefit of affliction, if it had been the means of his learning in God’s statutes something, that was “better to him than thousands of gold and silver.” This was indeed an enlightened judgment for one to form, who had so small a part of “the law of God’s mouth,” and so large a portion of this world’s treasure. And yet, if we study only his Book of Psalms to know the important uses and privileges of the law, and his son’s Book of Ecclesiastes to discover the value of gold and silver,§ we shall probably be led to make the same estimate for ourselves. With the same, or rather with far higher delight than the miser calculates “his thousands of gold and silver,” does the believer tell out the precious contents of the law of his God. After having endeavoured in vain to count the thousands in his treasure, he is constrained to sum up their value by a single name—“the unsearchable riches of Christ.”|| Would not the smallest spot of ground be estimated at the price of “thousands of gold and silver,” if it were known to conceal under its surface a mine of inexhaustible treasure? That it is, which makes the word so inestimable—that the “pearl of great price”—“the hidden treasure”—lies concealed in its pages.¶ The believer would not therefore part with one leaf of his Bible for all the “thousands of gold and silver” that the world could empty before him. He knows himself to be in possession

* Prov. xxix. 1. † Isa. ix. 13. ‡ Rev. vii. 14. § Eccl. v. 9—20; vi. 1, 2. || Ephes. iii. 8. ¶ Matt. xiii. 44—46.

of the substance—he has found all besides to be a shadow. “I lead,” saith the Saviour, “in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment; that I may cause them that love me to *inherit substance*, and I will *fill their treasures*.”* To those, however, who do not “search the Scriptures,” as “testifying of Christ,”† they are comparatively of little value. It is the Saviour’s glory that gilds the page, and when “with unveiled face we behold it in this glass,”‡ we know of no arithmetic that can compute the price of that which is unspeakably better than the treasures of the earth.

Christian! Be ever ready with your testimony, that no book has imparted the delight which you have found in the Book of God. You have here opened the surface of much intellectual interest and solid instruction. But it is the joy that you are enabled to find in the revelation of the Saviour—in his commands—in his promises—in his ways—that leads you to exclaim, “More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold!”§ Yes, indeed—Every promise—every declaration—centring in him—is a pearl—and the word of God is full of these precious pearls. If then they be the richest, who have the best and the largest treasure, those who have most of the word in their hearts—not those who have most of the world in their houses—are justly entitled to this pre-eminence. “Let then the word of Christ dwell in us *richly* in all wisdom.”|| For those who are rich in this heavenly treasure, are men of substance indeed. But can I add my testimony to this estimate of the sacred treasure? Many will inconsiderately acknowledge its supreme value, while they yet hesitate to relinquish even a scanty morsel of this world’s portion for an interest in it. Is then “this law of God’s mouth” by me habitually preferred to every worldly advantage, so that I am ready to forego every consideration of my own interest,¶ if it may only be the means of uniting my heart more closely to the Book of God? If I cannot set my seal to the testi-

* Prov. viii. 20, 21. † John v. 39. ‡ 2 Cor. iii. 18. § Psalm xix. 16. || Col. iii. 16.

¶ A Jewish Rabbi, when induced by the prospect of a lucrative situation to fix his settlement in a place *where there was no synagogue*, is said to have resisted the temptation by the recollection of this verse—Poli Synopsis in loco. A reproof to Christians, who in “choosing the bounds of their habitation,” have not always been single-minded in laying before them the gospel rule, Matt. vi. 33,

mony here given of its value, I fear it must be, because I have not yet opened the mine. But if I can agree with this man of God—I may take up the expression of joyful surprise with far more justice than Archimedes—‘I have found it! I have found it!’ What have I found? That which the world could never have given me—that which the world can never deprive me of.

Lord! help me to prize the law as coming from “thy mouth.” Let it be for ever written upon my heart. Let me be daily exploring my hidden treasures. Let me be enriching myself and all around me with a present possession and interest in these heavenly blessings.

PART X.

73. THY HANDS HAVE MADE AND FASHIONED ME: GIVE ME UNDERSTANDING, THAT I MAY LEARN THY COMMANDMENTS.

IN the vast universe of wonders, man is the greatest wonder—‘the noblest work of God.’ A special council of the Sacred Trinity appears to have been held respecting his creation. “God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”* What an amazing thought is it, that the three Eternal subsistents in the glorious Godhead should have united in gracious design and operation towards the dust of the earth! But thus man was formed—thus raised out of his parent dust—from this low original, to be immediately set apart “for the Master’s use,” the living temple and habitation of Divine glory—a being full of God. The first moment that he opened his eyes to behold the light and beauty of the new-made world, the Lord separated him to receive the continual supply of his own life. His body was fitted as a tabernacle for his soul, “curiously wrought” by the hand of God, and all its parts and “members written in his book, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.” Most naturally therefore does the contemplation of this “perfection of beauty” in the works of God raise the grateful and adoring mind upward—“I will praise thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made,—marvellous are thy works, and that my soul

* Gen. i. 26.

knows right well.”* “Thy hands have made me and fashioned me.”

But where the soul is alive to the recollection of being the workmanship of God, there will be a sense of important relation to God, and a desire for a spiritual principle of life, and understanding to act according to this relation. Could we suppose that man was framed to eat, to sleep, and to die—that, after taking a few turns upon the grand walk of life, he was to descend into the world of eternal silence, we might well ask the question of God—“Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain?”† But the first awakening of man from his death-like sleep, at once enlightens him in the right knowledge of the end of his creation, and stirs up in his heart this prayer—“Give me understanding”—that this end of my creation may be fully answered. What is it which thy creature and workmanship begs of thee? That, as thou hast given me a natural being, thou wouldst give me the principle of spiritual existence, without which my natural existence can never glorify thee. Thou hast indeed “curiously wrought” my frame, but sin has marred all. Make me thy “spiritual” workmanship created “in Christ Jesus.”‡ “Give me understanding”—spiritual knowledge, “that I may learn thy commandments”—“Renew a right spirit within me.”§ But how difficult, how impossible, is it to convince the natural man that he needs to make such a prayer as this! No—he is puffed up in his own wisdom, though he is told in the word of God, that he must “become a fool, that he may be wise.”|| But if ever this radical change—this new state of existence, should be known by him, this prayer will be offered up eagerly and frequently, and every step of his way heavenwards will his experience be maturing in an increasing sense of his need of divine “wisdom and spiritual understanding.”

The song of heaven reminds us of this end of our creation—“Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power, for thou hast created all things, *and for thy pleasure they are* and were created.”¶ And in harmony with this song must we ever acknowledge, that “the Lord hath made all things for himself”**—that he “created all things for his glory.”†† Nor let the recollection that he

* Psalm cxxxix. 14—16. † Psalm lxxxix. 47. ‡ Ephes. ii. 10. § Psalm li. 10. || 1 Cor. iii. 18. ¶ Rev. iv. 11. ** Prov. xvi. 4. †† Isa. xliii. 7.

“created us by Jesus Christ”* fail to bring to our view the grand work of redemption, and the work of the new creation consequent upon it. He who created us in his own image, when that image was lost, not to lose his property in us, put a fresh seal upon his natural right in us by creation, when he purchased us with his own blood. Oh! let us not then be insensible to this constraining motive to “learn his commandments.” “Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”†

74. THEY THAT FEAR THEE, WILL BE GLAD WHEN THEY SEE ME ;
BECAUSE I HAVE HOPED IN THY WORD.

How cheering is the converse with a tried and established believer! How satisfactory and enlivening is the exhibition of the power of faith, enabling him to place, and habitually to maintain in exercise, a hope in the promises of God! And what an excitement to this close communion with God, to think that the light which he thus receives may shine on those around him. What a comfort will it be unto him, even in his own hour of temptation, that the hope which he is then enabled to maintain by the word and promise of God, shall not only prove the support of his own soul, but the stay and trust of the Lord’s people around! Many a tempted Christian, who scarcely dares to cherish a hope, and who is continually oppressed with such fears as this—“I shall one day perish by the hands of Saul,”‡ when he hears of one and another exercised in the same trials, and who have hoped in God’s word, and have not been disappointed, “will be glad when they see them.” Thus David also recorded his conflicts, that we may not despair of our own; and his triumphs, that “in the name of our God, we might set up our banners.”§ “I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, upon the Lord.”|| Thus also, when under affliction, he was comforted with the thought of comforting others with the history of his own experience—“My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof and be glad.

* Eph. iii. 9. Col. i. 16. † 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20. ‡ 1 Sam. xxvii. 1. § Psalm xx. 5. || Psalm xxvii. 13, 14.

O praise the Lord with me, and let us magnify his name together. He hath put a new song into my mouth, even praise unto our God. Many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord. Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name; the righteous shall compass me about, for thou shalt deal bountifully with me.”* And in this view, the believer who has been “sifted in the sieve” of temptation, without the least “grain” of faith or hope “falling upon the earth,”† stands forth as a monument of the Lord’s faithfulness, to “strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees, and to say to them that are of a feeble heart, Be strong, fear not.”‡ Those that are fearful and of little faith, “are glad when they see him.” They “thank God” for him, and “take courage”§ for themselves. What a motive is this to keep us from despondency and murmuring, that we may enjoy the privilege of ministering to the comfort of the afflicted, and that we may not, by giving way to unbelief, destroy those who are already “cast down.” And let the weak and distressed remember, that it is their duty and privilege to seek for and to prize the society of those who have been exercised and instructed in the Lord’s school.

Believer! what have you to tell to the discouraged soul of the faithfulness of your God! Cannot you put courage into the heart of your drooping brethren, by declaring that you have never been “ashamed of your hope?” Cannot you tell them from your own experience, that Jesus “is for a foundation stone, a tried stone, a sure foundation?”|| Cannot you show them, that, because he has borne the burden of their sins, he is able to “bear their griefs and carry their sorrows?”¶ that you have tried him, that you have found him so? Oh! be animated—be encouraged to know more of Christ yourself; let your hope in him be strengthened, that you may cause gladness in the hearts of those that see you, so that “whether you be afflicted, or whether you be comforted, it may be for their consolation and salvation.”**

But, O my God! how much cause have I for shame, that I impart so little of the glorious light of thy truth to those around me. Perhaps some poor trembling sinner “has

* Psalm xxxiv. 2, 3, xl. 3, cxlii. 7. Comp. also lxix. 30—32. † Amos ix. 9. ‡ Isa. xxxv. 3, 4. § Acts xxviii. 15. || Isa. xxviii. 16. ¶ Isa. liii. 4.
** 2 Cor. i. 6.

been glad when he saw me," hoping to hear something of the Saviour from my lips, and has found me straitened and cold and dumb. Oh! that I may be so "filled with the Spirit," so experienced in his gracious ways, that I may invite "all that fear thee to come to me," that I may "tell them what thou hast done for my soul,"* so that "when men are cast down, they may say, 'There is lifting up.'"+

75. I KNOW, O LORD, THAT THY JUDGMENTS ARE RIGHT, AND THAT THOU IN FAITHFULNESS HAST AFFLICTED ME.

'I KNOW, O Lord, that thy rules of proceeding with me are agreeable to thy perfect wisdom; and I am equally satisfied, that the afflictions that thou hast laid upon me from time to time, are only to fulfil thy gracious and faithful promise of making me eternally happy in thyself.' Blessed fruit of affliction! when we can thus "see the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy"—that his "thoughts towards us are thoughts of peace, and not of evil."§ Those who are enabled to exercise "the patience and faith of the saints," have learned this difficult but most consoling lesson. They are able to decipher the mysterious lines in God's providence, and in the cheerful confidence of faith to say—"I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right." In taking this view of the Lord's dealings, unbelief is rebuked, and, if ever we had been tempted to think, that "God had forgotten to be gracious," we recollect ourselves, and are constrained to say—"This is our infirmity."|| This assurance, that the Lord acts in perfect wisdom and intimate knowledge of what our respective cases require, leads his people to yield to his appointments in dutiful silence. It was this that made Aaron, under his most afflictive domestic calamity, "hold his peace."¶ Job under a similar dispensation was enabled to say—"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."** Eli's language in the same trial was—"It is the Lord, let *him* do what seemeth him good."†† David hushed his impatient spirit into silence—"I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it." And when Shimei cursed him, he said—"Let him alone, let him curse, for

* Psalm lxvi. 16. † Job xxii. 29. ‡ James v. 11. § Jer. xxix. 11.
 || Psalm lxxvii. 7—10. ¶ Lev. x. 1—3. ** Job i. 21. †† 1 Sam. iii. 18.

the Lord hath bidden him.”* The Shunamite bowed in the meek resignation of faith; and when severely exercised in the judgments of God, acknowledged—“It is well.”† Hezekiah kissed the rod while it was smiting him to the dust: “Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken.”‡ Thus uniform is the language of the Lord’s people under chastisement: “I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right.”

But David not only acknowledges God’s right to deal with him as he sees fit, and his wisdom in dealing with him as he actually had done: he goes farther than this—he says—“Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.” He sees as much love as wisdom in the trial which the Lord appointed for him. He was persuaded that God, in afflicting him, was fulfilling his everlasting covenant, and faithfully performing the promises of that covenant;§ and thus the believer will often perceive, and it is his privilege always to believe, even when he cannot perceive, that the reasons of chastisement are to be found in the faithfulness of God, and his designs of love to our souls.|| That this is true, will appear by the gracious effects of chastening—in the restoring of our souls,¶ the teaching of our hearts**—the healing of our backslidings††—the continual purging of our sins.‡‡ If it be asked, How is the faithfulness of God especially magnified in the afflictions of his people? Probably many of his gracious designs towards them could have been accomplished in no other way. Thus the death-blow is given to their pride of worldliness—their besetting sins are mortified: thus he purgeth the “branch that beareth fruit, that it may bring forth more fruit.”§§ And under these trials many sweet tokens of love are vouchsafed, which under circumstances of outward prosperity, could not have been received with the same gratitude and delight.

You that are living at ease in the indulgence of what this poor world can afford, how little do we envy your portion! How surely in some future day will you be taught by experience to envy ours! The world’s riches are becoming poorer, and the world’s pleasures more tasteless

* Psalm xxxix. 9. 2 Sam. xvi. 11, 12. † 2 Kings iv. 26. ‡ Isa. xxxix. 8. § Psalm lxxix. 30—32. || Deut. viii. 16. ¶ Verse 67, and texts referred to on that verse. ** Verse 71 and texts. †† Hos. ii. 6, 7, 14. ‡‡ Isa. xvii. 9, xlviii. 10, Zech. xiii. 9. §§ John xv. 2. —

every day. And what will they be, and how will they appear, when eternity is at hand! Affliction is the only blessing that the Lord gives without requiring us to ask for it.* And he gives it as a special token of love.† We must, therefore, receive it as promised, not as threatened; and when “the peaceable fruits of righteousness,”‡ which it worketh in God’s time and way, begin to spring up in our hearts, may we ever be ready with our humble and grateful acknowledgments of the righteousness of the Lord’s “judgments,” and the “faithfulness” of his corrections.

76. LET, I PRAY THEE, THY MERCIFUL KINDNESS BE FOR MY COMFORT, ACCORDING TO THY WORD UNTO THY SERVANT.

SEVERAL of the preceding verses have spoken of affliction.§ The Psalmist now presents his petition for alleviation under it. But of what kind? Does he ask to have it removed? Does he “beseech the Lord, that it might depart from him?”|| The repeated acknowledgments that he had so recently made of the support vouchsafed under it, and the benefits he had derived from it, had reconciled him to commit its measure¶ and continuance to the Lord. All that he needs, and all that he asks for, is a sense of his “merciful kindness” unto his soul, thus submitting to his justice in his accumulated trials, and expecting consolation under them solely upon the ground of his gracious consideration. And indeed to a believer nothing beside can afford a moment’s rest to the soul. The whole earth, in its brightest visions of delight, destitute of the light of his countenance, is a barren wilderness, a state of exile. It matters little where we are, or what we have, in the fulness of gospel ordinances, unless the Lord leads us, meets us, and blesses us with his “merciful kindness for our comfort,” we are as “in a thirsty land where no water is.” Absalom might as well have been at Geshur as

* Phil. i. 29. Lord Bacon somewhere remarks, ‘that, however temporal prosperity may have been promised to the Church under the Old Testament, affliction, and suffering, and trial, are the promises made to the Church under the gospel dispensation.’

† Heb. xii. 6. Rev. iii. 19.

‡ Such as patience, experience, hope—the work of tribulation. Heb. xii. 11, with Rom. v. 3—5.

§ Verses 67, 71, 75.

|| 2 Cor. xii. 8.

¶ Jer. x. 24.

at Jerusalem, as long as he "saw not the king's face."* Never can the Lord "give us any thing richly to enjoy," if this source of refreshment be withheld. The worldling's inquiry is—"Who will show us any good?" The Christian forms his answer into a prayer—"Lord! lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me."† "Let thy merciful kindness be for my comfort." This will give the enjoyment of every real good, and supply the place of every fancied good. It is a blessing that never cloyes and will never end; and so sweet is the relish, that every fresh taste quenches the thirst for earthly pleasures. "Whosoever drinketh of this water," said our divine Saviour, "shall thirst again. But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst."‡ "Delight thyself in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart."§

But, reader, do you wish to realize this comfort for your own soul? Then must you seek to approach your God by the only way of access. You must learn to contemplate him in the only glass in which he is exhibited as a God of love—"in the face of Jesus Christ."|| You must guard against looking for comfort from any other source. You must beware especially of that satisfaction in creature cisterns, which draws you away from "the fountain of living waters."¶ You must learn also to prize this comfort supremely, and not to be content without some enjoyment, or even with a scanty measure of enjoyment; but rather let every refreshment of the day be made a step for desiring and attaining renewed and sweeter refreshment for to-morrow. We are indeed too much inclined to look at this blessed experience, as if it belonged to a more advanced stage of Christian progress than our own, and perhaps sometimes to be satisfied with a feeble degree of spiritual attainment, and to go on in a low, depressed, and sullen frame, as if this privileged state was never to rise in our prospect. But, in order to rouse ourselves from this dishonourable, desponding view, and to cultivate a more humble, tender, filial, and happy walk with God, nothing will be more effectual, than a pleading earnestness of supplication—a remembrance of the word of promise before the throne of grace—"Accord-

* Compare 2 Sam. xiv. 23, 24. † Psalm iv. 6. ‡ John iv. 13, 14. § Psalm xxxvii. 4. || 2 Cor. iv. 6. Comp. John xiv. 6. ¶ Jer. ii. 13.

ing to thy word unto thy servant." Lay, then, believer, your finger upon one or all of the promises of your God. Spread before the Lord his own hand-writing and seals, and your Saviour hath said, "According to your faith be it unto you."* "The king is held in the galleries,"† and, if he should "make as though he would go farther," he is not unwilling that we should "constrain him, saying, Abide with us."‡ No veil now but the veil of unbelief need hinder us from seeking an unclouded, everlasting smile of "merciful kindness" upon our heavenly Father's reconciled face. Only let us see to it, that he is the first, the best, the habitual object of our contemplation, the satisfying well-spring of our delight; that he is the one only desire, to which every other is subordinate, and in which every other is absorbed.

Lord Jesus! I would seek for a renewed interest in "thy merciful kindness." I would not forget that it was this that brought thee down from heaven—that led thee to endure the death of the cross—that has washed me in thy precious blood—that visits me with many endearing tokens of thy presence. O let all my days be spent in the sense of this "merciful kindness for my comfort," and in render-

* Matt. ix. 29. The writer cannot forbear indulging himself with a transcript of the prayers of Monica, Augustine's mother, as a beautiful example of pleading earnestness and simplicity of faith in bringing the promises of the word to the throne of grace: 'Lord, these promises were made to be made good to some, and why not to me? I hunger; I need; I thirst; I wait. Here is thy hand-writing in thy word, and in the last sacrament I had thy seal affixed to it. I am resolved to be as importunate till I have obtained, and as thankful afterwards, as by thy grace I shall be enabled; being convinced that I am utterly lost and undone, if thou hearest not the desires of the humble; and if thou dost hear and grant, I am so well acquainted with myself and with my own heart, that I have nothing to glory in, but I shall wholly glory in the Lord; and I do resolve and believe, that I shall to all eternity celebrate and magnify the riches of thy grace. Thy promises are the discoveries of thy purposes, and vouchsafed as materials for our prayers; and in my supplications I am resolved every day to present and tender them back to thee, and if thou wilt have regard to them, and appear to be a "God of truth" to my soul, a poor creature, that hath long feared to burn in hell for hypocrisy, will be secured and made happy for ever. I am resolved to wait upon thee, and to cast down my soul upon thee, in this way, and thou hast assured me, thou art a "God of judgment." Thou didst promise in judgment. Thou knewest what thou didst in making such promises, and thou wilt be a "God of judgment," thou knowest when and where to make them good, and thou hast pronounced—"Blessed are all they that wait for thee." On thee I will wait, and for this blessing I will hope and look.'

† Can. vii. 5, also vi. 5.

‡ Comp. Luke xxiv. 28, 29, with Gen. xxxii. 26—29. Compare the invitation given, Can. iv. 16—instantly accepted, v. 1.

ing to thee the unworthy returns of grateful obedience and filial service.

77. LET THY TENDER MERCIES COME UNTO ME, THAT I MAY
LIVE: FOR THY LAW IS MY DELIGHT.

Does not the experience of the child of God abundantly testify that the Lord's mercies are "tender mercies?" "Like as a father, he pitieth his children,"* he yearns over them—"How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore, my bowels are troubled for him: I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord."† When his prodigal child is returning with little to expect but upbraiding looks, if not a wrathful frown of banishment, it would seem that the "tender mercies" of his Father are burying not only his sins, but also his very confessions, in the depths of the sea, and that he is welcomed to his forsaken home with the most affectionate tokens of unabated love.‡ As a father, he puts away from his children all anxiety respecting "what they shall eat, or what they shall drink, or wherewithal they shall be clothed," with the parental assurance, that he "knoweth that they have need of these things."§ As a father, he also "chasteneth"|| them—"he suffereth their manners"¶—he "spareth them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him"***—and finally, he determineth respecting each of them by an act of sovereign will and power—"Thou *shalt call* me, My Father, and shalt not depart from me."†† Again—let us look at him in the yet more endearing character of a mother—"As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you. They may forget, yet will I not forget thee."‡‡ Now are not these mercies "tender mercies?" And when they "come unto" the soul, do they not become the principle of spiritual life, devotedness, and enjoyment? David's soul had been quickened from that awful "death in trespasses and sins,"§§ but he was not content, nor will any tender-hearted believer be content, with the mere breathing of spiritual existence. He seeks to "live," not as the trees of winter that are alive, and but just alive—but vigorous, thriving, fruitful, living

* Psalm ciii. 13. † Hos. xi. 8. Jer. xxxi. 20. ‡ Comp. Luke xv. 20—24. § Matt. vi. 25—34. || Deut. viii. 5. ¶ Acts xiii. 18. ** Mal. iii. 17. †† Jer. iii. 19. ‡‡ Isa. lxvi. 13, xlix. 15. §§ Eph. ii. 1.

to God and for God in every form and sphere, in every hour and action of the day, his feebleness becoming strength in the Lord, so that he “walks up and down in his name.”* Thus does he “reign in life,”† rising to more of its honour and dignity, and reaching forth to more of its excellency and happiness. But let us not lose sight of the Author of our life—the abundant overflowing spring from which it is maintained. “In Christ was life,”‡ and he “came that we might have life, and that we might have it more abundantly.”§ There can be, therefore, no exercises of life without a vital union to Christ—the source of life. Shall we then refrain from believing in Christ, because we cannot feel the power and influence of this spiritual principle? This would be indeed like refusing to abide in the vine, till we could bring forth fruit, whereas the branch, while separated from the vine, must ever be fruitless and withered.|| We must receive life from Christ—not bring it to him. Faith implants us in him, and Christ dwelling in the heart by faith “becomes the life of the soul, animating and moving it in the ways of God.”¶ This life, therefore, will not fail to show itself in “delight in God’s law”—not as if we would live upon the mere surface of the gospel (which is barren and unproductive, as any other surface of the wilderness, in spiritual fruitfulness,) but as pressing out from its hidden treasures, its real life and consolation. This delight will furnish a plea for our use at the throne of grace; ‘If this is a fruit and acting of the life of thine own implanting, Lord! cherish it. Let me live by the influence of “thy tender mercies.” I venture to plead my delight in thy law as an evidence of my adoption into thy family. And therefore I would renew my plea and my petition—“Let thy tender mercies come unto me, that” my life may be not only existence, but enjoyment—the beginning, the earnest, of the everlasting life and bliss of heaven.’

78. LET THE PROUD BE ASHAMED; FOR THEY DEALT PERVERSELY WITH ME WITHOUT A CAUSE; BUT I WILL MEDITATE IN THY PRECEPTS.

THE prophecy, with which God himself condescended to open the history of the church, has ever since been in the

* Zech. x. 12. † Rom. v. 17. ‡ John i. 4. § John x. 10. || See John xx. 4, 5. ¶ Compare Gal. ii. 20, with Ezek. xxxvi. 27.

course of accomplishment.”* “Enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman,” has been the prevailing character and course of the world. “An unjust man is an abomination to the just, and he that is upright in the way, is abomination to the wicked.”† David, however, prayed for the confusion of his enemies—not in a vindictive spirit, as if thirsting for their destruction, but rather as a wholesome chastening, that might eventually turn to their salvation. “Fill their faces with shame, *that they may seek thy name, O Lord.*”‡ That his prayer was the expression of his tender compassion rather than of resentful feeling, is sufficiently evident from his affectionate weeping concern for their immortal interests.§ Prayers of the same deprecating character dropped from the lips of the gentle and compassionate Saviour,|| yet the objects of his awful deprecations appear to have been interested in the most yearning sympathies of his heart.¶ Probably, however, a regard for the honour of God combined with a view to the eventual interest of his enemies, to dictate this prayer in David’s heart. Doubtless there was a conviction in his mind, that their malice against him was only the working of their enmity against God—that it was for his sake that they hated him,—that it was not so much him that they hated and persecuted, as God in him. This it was that gave energy to his prayer. As a servant of God, he was ready to say—“Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? and am not I grieved at those that rise up against thee? *I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies.*”** The followers of a despised Saviour must indeed expect to be sorely distressed with the perverseness of the proud. But when, like their Master, they can testify that it is “without a cause,”†† they may take the encouragement of their Master’s words—“Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven.”‡‡

And have you, reader, been exercised with trials from an ungodly world? If you have been made the derision of the proud, or have been slighted, or ill-treated by the

* Gen. iii. 15. Comp. Rev. xii. 17. † Prov. xxix. 27. ‡ Psalm lxxxiii. 16. § Verses 56, 136. || Psalm lxix. 21—23. ¶ Comp. Matt. xxiii. 37. ** Psalm cxxxix. 21, 22. †† Psalm xxxv. 19: lxix. 4: with John xv. 25. ‡‡ Matt. v. 11, 12.

ungodly, has it never excited revengeful feelings within? Have you always been enabled to set your Saviour's example before you, and "in patience possessing your soul," to refer your cause to your Almighty Father and Friend?—"O Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me."* Remember—He has engaged to take up your cause—"Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? *I tell you, that he will avenge them speedily.*"† But it is important to remark the experience of a child of God in the hour of trial. He knows where to go, and what to do. Unperplexed by difficulty, and accustomed to go to the word of God for direction and support, he "meditates in his precepts." There is often a hurry of mind in times of difficulty, which unhinges the soul from the simple exercise of faith. But habit brings practice, and steadiness, and simplicity, in which frame we are most sweetly enabled to fix our hearts in recollection upon the word of God, and to apply its directions and encouragements to the exigency of the present moment. Oh! how inestimably precious is the word of God, that furnishes a refuge, armour, strength, consolation against the day of conflict; so that at whatever point the enemy may commence his attack, he may find us prepared to meet him, and able to defy all his efforts to disturb our peace.

79. LET THOSE THAT FEAR THEE TURN UNTO ME, AND THOSE
THAT HAVE KNOWN THY TESTIMONIES.

THE believer desires to separate himself from "the proud and perverse" enemies of his God. And yet the prospect of walking alone to heaven is most uncongenial to him. 'Let the proud be put away from me. But "let those that fear thee turn unto me."' And, indeed, next to the blessing of communion with God, communion with the people of God is the highest privilege connected with our character. Sometimes, however, Christians walk too much aloof from each other, and suffer coldness, distance, and mutual differences and distrust to divide them from their brethren. Under such circumstances the prayer may be most suitable—that he, who has the hearts of all his people

* Isa. xxxviii. 14. Compare Psalm cxl. 12, 13. † Luke xviii. 7, 8.

in his hand, would “turn the hearts of those that fear him, and know his testimonies,” unto their brethren. It was the distinguished mark set upon Mordecai, that he was “accepted of the multitude of his brethren.”* In the primitive days of the Church, it was recorded of Demetrius that he “had good report of all men, and of the truth itself”†—and of the members of the Church generally, that “they did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and *having favour with all the people.*”‡ ‘Then’—as Chrysostom exultingly exclaims—‘the Church was a little heaven.’ Then they could say one to another—“Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity,”§ and even their heathen neighbours were awed and constrained to the confession—“See how these Christians love one another!” Alas! that our Jerusalem should no longer exhibit the picture of a “city compact together”||—that so many “walls of partition” should separate the Christian from his brother—so many hinderances should interpose—so that our Zion has very rarely been exhibited in her “perfection of beauty,”¶ when “the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul.”** Prejudice and misconception divided Job from his friends.†† Want of forbearance cankered the union of the members of the Church of Rome,‡‡ and even prevailed to separate chief friends—Paul and Barnabas.§§ Diversity of sentiment injured the influence of brotherly love at Corinth.|||| And thus it has been in every successive age of the Church; so that the period is yet prospective, when the full answer to the Redeemer’s prayer, and the grand display to the world of the Divine original of the gospel shall be manifested.¶¶ But as “the communion of saints” was the peculiar feature of primitive Christianity, and has continued from the earliest times of the Church to form an article of her faith, we may conclude, that, in proportion as we return to the primitive

* Esth. x. 3. † 3 John, 12. ‡ Acts ii. 46, 47.

§ Psalm cxxxiii. 1. Most truly catholic was the rule of the excellent Philip Henry, and most consistently exemplified in his Christian conduct, determining “in those things, in which all the people of God are agreed, to spend my zeal; and as for other things about which they differ, to walk according to the light God hath given me, and charitably to believe others to do so too.”—Life, Williams’ Edition, p. 127.

|| Ps. cxvii. 3. ¶ Ps. cxvii. 1, 2. ** Acts iv. 32. †† Job vi. 29. ‡‡ Rom. xiv. xv. 1—7. §§ Acts xv. 37. ||| 1 Cor. i. 10—12. ¶¶ John xvii. 21.

standard, we shall be able to hold closer fellowship with each other—as “members of one body”*—“considering one another, to provoke unto love and to good works”†—“bearing one another’s burdens,”‡ and “receiving one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.”§ Want of Christian self-denial presents the main hinderance to the “keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” But—admitting that some of the brethren are “weak in the faith” in comparison with ourselves—are we then to be ‘rolling endlessly the returning stone’—obtruding always the same stumbling of offence upon them?¶ We are not to please ourselves in compelling them to adopt our views, but rather to “receive them and bear their infirmities.”** Accursed be that charity that is preserved by “the shipwreck of faith!” But though no gospel truth must be denied, there are times, when it may be forborne. The apostle “knew and was persuaded of the Lord Jesus that there was nothing unclean of itself;”†† yet, instead of deeming it necessary to insist upon it, he was content that “every man should be fully persuaded in his own mind.”‡‡ Liberty must give place to love; and he would rather restrain himself than endanger the safety of a weaker brother, or turn from one that loved his Saviour.§§ Wherever, therefore, in the judgment of Christian charity, we discover the character of one “that loves our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity,”||| we must be ready to give them our very hearts, to view them as brethren, as one with ourselves, and to welcome them with our expressions of brotherly love, as those whom, with all their infirmities, Jesus “is not ashamed to call his brethren.”¶¶ We must be ready to turn to them, as those “that fear God, and have known his testimonies.”

Another exercise of Christian self-denial, the want of which is most detrimental to the unity of the Church, is the sacrifice of taste, in manifesting a decided preference for the society of those among the people of God, even when their habits of mind may bear very little congeniality with our natural inclinations. And may not the believer’s anxiety for the company and assistance of the Lord’s peo-

* 1 Cor. xii. 12—27. † Heb. x. 24. ‡ Gal. vi. 2; v. 13. § Rom. xv. 7. || Morning Exercises, Oct. 16—2. ¶ Rom. xiv. 1. ** Ibid. xv. 1. †† Ibid. xiv. 14. ‡‡ Ibid. xiv. 5. §§ Ibid. xiv. 13, 15. 1 Cor. viii. 13. ||| Ephes. vi. 21. Compare 1 John iii. 14. *¶ Heb. ii. 11, 12.

ple, serve as a rebuke to those, who, though invested with the profession of the Christian name, are far from being dissociated with the society of the world? Surely those, who are so easily attracted by the loveliness of many of its most avowed votaries, that they can overlook the absence of their Saviour's image, for the sake of what is congenial to their self-indulgent taste, can have but little relish for that heavenly enjoyment which unites unworldly Christians together in close and hallowed communion with God. And we cannot but trace it to the deteriorating influence of this worldly spirit, that we so often find Christians of this character ready to take disgust at the infirmities of the real brethren of the Lord, and to overlook the image of Christ in them, from the unsightliness of the garb in which it may sometimes be covered. It will, however, be a mark that we "fear God, and have known his testimonies," if we "turn" to his people. And to his people—to those especially who are young in the faith, it ought to be considered as a high privilege to associate with "those who have known his testimonies;" "fathers"* in the gospel; honoured instruments in the Lord's hands in the important work of counselling the inexperience of their weaker brethren. Yet any obstruction standing in the way of their "turning unto us," perhaps may be the appointed means of leading us to a more simple dependence on divine teaching and grace, and to a more blessed anticipation of our Father's house in heaven, where all will be harmony, peace, and love. 'We shall carry truth and the knowledge of God to heaven with us; we shall carry purity thither, devotedness of soul to God and our Redeemer, divine love and joy, if we have their beginnings here, with whatsoever else of permanent excellency, that hath a settled fixed seat and place in our souls now; and shall there have them in perfection. But do you think we shall carry strife to heaven? Shall we carry anger to heaven? Envyings, heart-burnings, animosities, shall we carry these to heaven with us? Let us labour to divest ourselves and strike off from our spirits every thing that shall not go with us to heaven, or is equally unsuitable to our end and way, that there may be nothing to obstruct and hinder our abundant entrance at length into the everlasting kingdom.'†

* 1 John ii. 13, 14.

† Howe's Works, vol. iv. 126, 127.—'It will be one of the felicities of heaven

80. LET MY HEART BE SOUND IN THY STATUTES, THAT I BE
NOT ASHAMED.

How many “have made shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience,”* from a heart unsound “in the Lord’s statutes!” Not having seen the spiritual requirements of the statutes, and resting in an outward obedience, they falsely conceived themselves to be “alive without the law,”† and, “touching the righteousness that is of the law, blameless.”‡ Others go a little beyond the surface, and yet the want of “simplicity and godly sincerity,” of brokenness of heart, love to the Saviour and dependence upon his grace, sooner or later discovers to their eternal confusion that “the root of the matter is” not “in them.” “Their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust.” “Their goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.”§ An unsound professor, like beautiful fruit, may attract the eye of a cursory beholder, but a more narrow inspection will show a worm at the core, which has spoiled nearly to the surface.|| Such a religion can be described in no other view than as a shrivelled mass of inactive formality—a dead image of a living thing. Alas! how common is it to profess to take Christ for a Saviour, while the heart is evidently worshipping mammon as its god! How possible is it to be “carnally-minded” in the midst of daily engagements in spiritual exercises! How important is the recollection, that no change of place, of company, or of circumstances, can of itself effect a change of heart! “Saul among the prophets” was Saul still, “with another heart,”¶ indeed, but not a new heart. Sin was restrained, but not crucified. He “went out,” therefore, as one of his progenitors, “from the presence of the Lord,”** and perished a miserable apostate from the statutes of his God. Need we speak of Judas—a follower—a preacher—an apostle of Jesus Christ—living in familiar intercourse with his Lord—yet with all his privileges—all his profession—“gone to his own place”††—the melancholy victim of his own self-

(as Milner sweetly remarks upon the prejudices subsisting between Bernard and the supposed heretics of his day,) ‘that saints shall no longer misunderstand each other.’—Milner’s History of the Church, iii. 384.

* 1 Tim. i. 19. † Rom. vii. 9. ‡ Phil. iii. 6. § Isaiah v. 24. Hos. vi. 4.

|| Quæ splendent in conspectu hominis, sordent in conspectu judicis. Compare Luke xvi. 15. 1 Sam. xvi. 7.

¶ 1 Sam. x. 9—12. ** Gen. iv. 16. †† Acts i. 25.

deceitfulness? Need we allude to Balaam—"the man whose eyes were open—which heard the words of God—which saw the vision of the Almighty"—who could in the ken of his eye mark the goodliness of the inheritance of the Lord, and even in the distant horizon catch a glimpse of "Jacob's star and sceptre," and yet "loved the wages of unrighteousness?"* Need we bring to the mind's eye Ananias and Sapphira†—Alexander‡ and Demas§—and others of the same stamp of unsoundness—all of whom once shone as stars|| in the firmament of the Church—need we say what they became, and what became of them, to give energy to this prayer—"Let my heart be sound in thy statutes?" How fearful the thought of being "a branch in the true vine" only by profession, to be "taken away" at length—"cast forth as a branch—withered—gathered—cast into the fire—burned!"¶ It is in the inner man that hypocrisy sets up its throne, whence it commands the outward acts into whatever shape or form may be best suited to effect its purpose; and therefore, that the "soundness of our heart" may be ascertained, the jealous heart-searching Christian will begin with calling in the help and light of God to the dark and difficult work of self-investigation—"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me."** Can that "heart," which is found upon inquiry to be earthly—unprofitable under the power of the word††—regarding "secret iniquity"‡‡—seeking by-ends of praise,§§ reputation,||| or gain,¶¶—and for the attainment of these ends shrinking from the appointed cross—can that "heart be sound in the Lord's statutes?" Impossible!

But on the other hand, do you, trembling, self-suspecting believer, find that your trust in God is sincere, your desire towards him supreme, your obedience to him entire? You surely have been sending up this petition—"Let my heart be sound in thy statutes;" and the present experience of your heart is the gracious answer vouchsafed. Yet relax not in the daily exercises needful to preserve your heart in a sound and healthy state; commune with it

* Num. xxiv. 2—5, 17. 2 Pet. ii. 15. † Acts v. 1—10. ‡ Acts xix. 33, 34, with 1 Tim. i. 20. 2 Tim. iv. 14. § Col. iv. 14. Philemon 24, with 2 Tim. iv. 10. || Rev. xii. 4. ¶ John xv. 2, 6. ** Psalm cxxxix. 23, 24. †† Heb. vi. 8. ‡‡ Psalm xlv. 18. §§ 2 Kings ix. 16. ||| John xii. 43. ¶¶ John vi. 26. 1 Tim. vi. 5.

daily, and with diligent search. Be jealous, lest the change should not be thorough and universal—lest the heart should not be undivided and free from hypocrisy. Be much conversant with the word of God—loving it for itself—for its holiness—for its practical influences. Be chiefly afraid of inward decays—of a barren, sapless notion of experimental truth. Remember, that your profession can only be thriving, vigorous, and fruitful, as it is watered at the root. And for this purpose examine your settled judgment, your deliberate choice, your outgoing affections, your habitual allowed practice—applying to every detection of unsoundness the actings of faith on the blood of Christ, as the sovereign remedy for the diseases of a deceitful and desperately wicked heart.

But it may be said—will not these exercises of godly jealousy hinder our Christian assurance? Far from it. They will form an efficient preservative from carnal security. They will induce increasing wakefulness, activity, and circumspection in our daily walk, and thus, instead of retarding the enjoyment of Christian privilege, they will settle the foundation of a peaceful temperament within. It is thus, that the “sound heart” is connected with “a hope that maketh not ashamed”—the full blessing of Christian confidence. For the heart is made sound by being sprinkled with the blood of Christ—and when thus “sprinkled from an evil conscience,” it is prepared to “draw near”—even to “enter into the holiest”—“with full assurance of faith.”* This will be, indeed, to realize the boldness of an adopted child in spiritual communion with God. And thus shall we anticipate the coming of our Lord as the glorious consummation of all the prospects of faith. “Herein is our love made perfect, *that we may have boldness in the day of judgment.*”†

* See Heb. x. 19—22.

† 1 John iv. 17.

PART XI.

81. MY SOUL FAINTETH FOR THY SALVATION; BUT I HOPE IN THY WORD.

THE salvation of the gospel was the constant object of faith and desire to the Lord's people, under the dispensation of the Old Testament. The language of the Church was that of the most exalted triumph, in the glowing anticipation, and, indeed, as if in the full possession of the promised blessing—"It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord, we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation. I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for *he hath clothed* me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels."* And as it was the joy of their living moments, so was it the support and consolation of their dying moments:—"I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord,"† was the expression of the dying Patriarch's faith. The last words of this "sweet Psalmist of Israel," whose "soul was now fainting for God's salvation," are marked by the same confidence in a dark and foreboding prospect as regarded his family—"Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; for this is *all my salvation* and all my desire, although he make it not to grow."‡ Good old Simeon, in the break of the gospel day, was ready to "depart in peace, for his eyes had seen God's salvation."§ And if our souls are under the heavenly influence of this salvation, we shall find it natural to appropriate those feelings of ancient believers to ourselves, as descriptive of our own experience, nor will any other interpreter be needed to explain them. There will be an uneasiness felt in any interruption of our enjoyment, that

* Isaiah xxv. 9, lxi. 10. † Gen. xlix. 18. ‡ 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. § Luke ii. 28—30.

shows the soul to be "fainting for this salvation." Nothing will satisfy but the Saviour. The tempting offer of "all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them," would fail in attraction. Still the cry would be—"Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation."* "Let thy mercies come also unto me, O Lord, even thy salvation, according to thy word."† If I am the lowest expectant of this salvation, I ought to feel myself richer than the sole possessor of this world's portion. And therefore, if the Lord hides his face, I would look to no other quarter, I would stay by him, and "wait on him," though days and months and years may pass away, "until he have mercy upon me."‡ "My soul fainteth for his salvation," and with "the fullest cup of earth's best joy" pressed to my lips, my heart would burst with despair of satisfaction, "but" that "I hope in his word." "By this hope I am saved."§ In "the patience of hope,"|| I am resolved to wait until the last moment, lying at the footstool of my Saviour, until I am spurned away from his presence. I am looking for the "assurance of this hope"¶ —when I shall be able to anticipate the prospect of eternity, and with "the earnest of" the heavenly "inheritance" in my soul, to echo the voice of my coming Saviour—"Even so come, Lord Jesus."** Then, Christian, do you not see, and testify, how precious and important a part of our armour is hope? As a "helmet,"†† it has "covered our head in the day of battle," from many a "fiery dart of the wicked." In times of darkness, when the restless foe is too successful in hiding the prospect from the eye of faith, so that the child of God can scarcely, if at all, mount up and sing—even then Hope remains, and lights a taper in moments dark as the chambers of the grave—"Yet the Lord will command his loving-kindness in the day time, and in the night season his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life."‡‡ And when the afflicted, tempest-tossed soul is trembling at the prospect of impending danger—at this moment of infinite peril, Hope holds out the "anchor sure and steadfast,"§§ so that in the awful crisis, when "deep calleth unto deep, and all the waves and billows are going over us,"||| most unexpectedly "an entrance is ministered unto us *abun-*

* Psalm xxxv. 3. † Verse 41. ‡ Psalm cxxiii. 1, 2. § Rom. viii. 24.
 || 1 Thess. i. 3. ¶ Heb. vi. 11. ** Rev. xxii. 20. †† Ephes. vi. 17. †
 Thess. v. 8. ‡‡ Psalm xlii. 8. §§ Heb. vi. 19. ||| Psalm xlii. 7.

dantly,” in the Lord’s best time, into our “desired haven.”* And it is this hope alone that sustains us. Were we to conceive of God according to the notions of our own hearts, we should give way to most unbelieving impatience. But in the believing apprehension of the Divine character shining forth in the word with such love and wisdom, such tenderness and grace, we find our hope to be increased, comforted, and encouraged. The strength of the strongest of God’s people proves but small, when afflictions press heavily, and expected health is delayed. But though the “soul fainteth,” it cannot fail. Looking to the word, it gathers strength and hope. Faith is indeed the soul’s venture for eternity—but it is a sure venture—upon the ground of the word of God—stamped with such a marvellous mysterious impression of the glory and faithfulness of God, and communicating such Divine power and refreshment to the “fainting soul,” that the believer is constrained to produce his experience of its efficacy for the support of his tempted brethren. “I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord.”†

82. MINE EYES FAIL FOR THY WORD, SAYING, WHEN WILT THOU COMFORT ME?

THOUGH the believer may be enabled, in the habitual working of faith, to sustain his “hope in the word” of his God, yet “hope deferred maketh the heart sick.”‡ Perhaps you feel, drooping soul, that you have waited long enough, and still the promise is delayed. But what is the blessing that you are waiting for? If it regards the actual life of your soul, this, as being absolutely necessary, is both promised and given. If it regards only your spiritual enjoyment, its time and measure must be left with the Lord. Meanwhile, do not fear that by the protracted delay the blessing is likely to slide away from you. You will find, in the end, that perseverance in the exercise of waiting faith has turned to double advantage; and that many prayers have been offered, and important blessings vouchsafed, even when sensible tokens of refreshment and

* 2 Peter i. 11. Psalm cvii. 30. † Psalm xxvii. 13, 14. ‡ Prov. xiii. 12.

acceptance were withheld. Indeed, you could not expect to lose any thing in these conflicts of faith and patience, by which your gracious Lord is bringing your wayward will into more implicit subjection to himself. May you not rather believe, that the blessing, when the "Lord has hastened it in his time," will be so much the sweeter for every wrestling exercise which, as it were, "took it by force?"* Be assured, that waiting time is most precious. Not a moment of it will eventually be found to have been lost. And not a moment of it could possibly have been spared. It is the preparation time and work, by which the Lord has been progressively moulding your heart for the reception of a more refreshing and abundant mercy. And yet the interval of waiting is far from being a season of hardness, indolence, or carelessness. The absence of the Saviour is felt in the soul as the greatest trial, and his return and the enjoyment of his love is anticipated as the chiefest comfort. As well might the stars supply the place of the sun, as the joys of sense, or even the external duties of religion, supply to a waiting soul the place of an absent God. "The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth" for this blessed renewed manifestation to the soul. The main cause, however, of separation between us and God is now removed; "the stumbling-block is taken up out of the way," and the way is made plain before us. No mountains but those of our own raising now remain to oppose our progress, and even these the power of "faith as a grain of mustard-seed will remove to yonder place"†—"Lord! I believe; help thou my unbelief."‡ And thus in this frame of temporary desertion from the influence of unbelief, we mark the genuine character of a child of God, deprived indeed of the sensible presence of the Lord, but still mourning for the loss of him, waiting for his return, and "refusing to be comforted."§ And let it be remembered that the Lord may be honoured by an humble, sorrowful, tender, patient frame, as much as by the highest strains of exultation. "I will never come away from thee without thee"—said Bernard—in the true spirit of the wrestling patriarch—"I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Trust in his love is yet more honourable than the exercise of our

* Gen. xxxii. 25—28; with Matt. xi. 21. † Matt. xvii. 20. ‡ Mark ix. 24.
§ Psalm lxxvii. 2.

own love, and will not fail eventually to bring “quietness and assurance”* to the soul. This is indeed the frame in which assurance is most safely maintained and enjoyed. For this blessed privilege is as consistent with a state of conflict as of enjoyment. Contrition and resistance of sin are, equally with peace, love, joy, and triumph, graces of the gospel, fruits of the Spirit, and actings of faith. They are connected with precious promises.† They are themselves made subjects of promise,‡ so that they must accord with every Christian privilege. The gospel unites conviction and faith. It shows hell deserved and heaven purchased at one view—such a view as must exercise the soul with contrary operations. While, therefore, conviction without faith would be legal sorrow, assurance without conviction is gospel presumption. Paul’s experience happily united both. Never was man more exercised with conflict, and yet at the same moment more established in assurance.§ Thus whatever may be your success in Christian triumph, you must expect from time to time to renew the conflict—still, however, maintaining your assurance *as really* in wrestling trouble as before in exulting joy.

What then is the character of our experience? In seasons of trial are we girding ourselves for the conflict with the restless power of unbelief? Are we ready to part with the most profitable and pleasant ways of sin, or with whatever may give power to the natural inclination of the heart? Sometimes indeed we seem to go—as Job says—“mourning without the sun”||—“shut up, and we cannot come forth”¶—shut up, if not in prison,—at least in the courts of the prison (as Jeremiah in the court of the King’s prison**)—straitened in our desires, our hopes and expectations—doing little for the Lord—with little enjoyment in our own souls, and little apparent usefulness to the church. At such seasons it is our clear path of duty and privilege to “wait for the Lord” and to “wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and to *look for him.*”†† He “waiteth that he may be gracious. He is a God of judgment, and blessed are all they that wait for him.”‡‡

* Isaiah xxxii. 17. † Matthew, v. 3, 4. Isaiah lvii. 15. ‡ Zech. xii. 10.
§ Compare Rom. vii. 14—25. || Job xxx. 28. ¶ Psalm lxxxviii. 8. ** Jer.
xxxvii. 21. †† Isaiah viii. 17.

‡‡ Isaiah xxx. 18. ‘Thou mayest seek after honours, and not obtain them;

83. FOR I AM BECOME LIKE A BOTTLE IN THE SMOKE;
YET DO I NOT FORGET THY STATUTES.

THE shrivelled appearance of bottles of skin (such as the deceitful Gibeonites brought to Joshua,*) hung up in the smoke, afforded to David a lively and affecting picture of the misery to which his long-protracted trial of waiting for the Lord's return (combining probably with other personal trials) had reduced him. Thus he elsewhere describes the same state of affliction under somewhat similar figures—"I am like a broken vessel. My days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as a hearth."† Thus also Job speaks of himself—"My skin is black upon me, and my bones are burned with heat."‡ The church gives nearly the same representation of her deep distress—"Our skin was black like an oven, because of the terrible famine."§ And, lastly, in the same affecting views does the Saviour speak of the effect of suffering upon his tender frame—"My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws."|| Yet does it not seem strange to see God breaking the heart of his own child by protracted affliction, even at the time that he is suffering persecution for his name? But thus he tries and trains the faith of his people for higher exercises, and more enduring conflicts. Thus he proves them, and exhibits to the world the reality and power of their faith; in that they would rather pine away in affliction, than form "a way of escape" by sin. Thus, in the midst of aggravated and long-continued trial, such as seems to have brought down and wasted his strength, David had been enabled to preserve his recollection of the Lord's statutes, a striking evidence of the presence of his God with him, of the power of his grace, and the sufficiency of his word to supply unfailing support under the most afflictive circumstances. And yet we often read the blessed word without realizing any remarkable support to be derived from it, or without seeming

thou mayest labour for riches, and yet remain poor; thou mayest dote on pleasures, and have many sorrows. But our God of his supreme goodness says—Who ever sought me and found me not? Who ever desired me and obtained me not? Who ever loved me, and missed of me? I am with him that seeks for me. He hath me already, that wisheth for me; and he that loveth me is sure of my love. The way to come to me is neither long nor difficult.—Augustine.

* Josh. ix. 4. † Psalm xxxi. 12: cii. 3. Comp. Prov. xvii. 22. ‡ Job xxx. 30. § Lam. v. 10. || Psalm xxii. 15.

to discover in our experience the Divine strength of its consolations. Perhaps we fail in bringing to the study of it that humble, prayerful, dependent, expecting frame, which prepares the mind for the due reception of its comfort. Or we do not search it with the single eye to mark the glory, or increase in the knowledge, of the Saviour.* Or we need an hour of trial to display its astonishing power in upholding the soul, when all other stays of support have been found as "the trust in the shadow of Egypt—shame and confusion."†

A striking illustration of this trial, and of the gracious effects of Divine chastisement, is given in the history of Job. When Satan, by the permission of his God, "smote him with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown, and he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal, and sat down among the ashes," he might well have taken up this description of misery—"I am become like a bottle in the smoke." And when in this hour of depression he was enabled to resist the tempter in the person of his own wife, and commit himself with implicit resignation into the hands of his faithful God—"What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"‡—he might with equal propriety have expressed the confidence of the Psalmist—"Yet do I not forget thy statutes."§ And surely such an exercise of faith in the remembrance of the Lord's statutes in the time of trial is much more honourable to God than the desponding complaint—"The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me."§ For what is more beautiful than to mark the upholding preserving grace of God enabling the Christian, under the sharpest trials, to hold on his way? The confidence here marked—"I do not forget thy statutes"—implied that God had not forgotten him. How prone we are under our little trials—such as the coldness of friends, the unkindness of enemies, or the providential dispensations of our heavenly Father—to indulge hard thoughts of him, whose name and character, "without variableness or shadow of turning"—is "Love." This is only an indulgence of the proud, unhumiliated, sullen spirit within. Do we desire to "glorify God in the fires?"|| Let us learn to trust the Lord in the

* John v. 39. † Isaiah xxx. 1—3. ‡ Job ii. 7—10. § Isaiah xlix. 14.
|| Isaiah xxiv. 15.

long and wearisome seasons of tribulation. It is "when against hope we believe in hope, not staggering at the promise of God through unbelief," that we are "strong in faith, giving glory to God."*

84. HOW MANY ARE THE DAYS OF THY SERVANT? WHEN WILT THOU EXECUTE JUDGMENT ON THEM THAT PERSECUTE ME?—

85. THE PROUD HAVE DIGGED PITS FOR ME, WHICH ARE NOT AFTER THY LAW.

LONG-CONTINUED affliction is a severe exercise of faith, in which, however, though we may be enabled in the steadfastness of our confidence "not to forget the statutes" of our God, yet we shall not forbear to carry our complaint before him—"How many are the days of thy servant?"—my days of affliction under the "fury of the oppressor"—"the days of my pilgrimage" in this wilderness of trouble. Exposed as we are to the lawless persecutions or devices of the proud, oh! let us instantly flee to the refuge of prayer—as to the strong hold "whereunto we may continually resort."† Indeed, when our trial has done the Lord's appointed work, it will not fail to lead us thither, that, instead of attempting to take the vengeance into our own hands, we may, after our blessed Master's pattern, commit ourselves and our cause "to him that judgeth righteously."‡ 'And this'—as Archbishop Leighton excellently observes—"is the true method of Christian patience, that which quiets the mind, and keeps it from the boiling tumultuous thoughts of revenge; to turn the whole matter into God's hands, to resign it over to him, to prosecute when and as he thinks good. Not as the most, who had rather, if they had power, do for themselves, and be their own avengers; and, because they have not power, do offer up such bitter curses and prayers for revenge unto God, as are most hateful to him, and are far from this calm and holy way of committing matters to his judgment. The common way of referring things to God is indeed impious and dishonourable to him, being really no other than calling him to be a servant and executioner of our passion. We ordinarily mistake his justice, and judge of it according to

* Rom. iv. 18, 20. † Psalm lxxi. 3.

‡ 1 Peter ii. 23, and Archbishop Leighton on the passage.

our own precipitant and distempered minds. If wicked men be not crossed in their designs, and their wickedness evidently crushed, just when we would have it, we are ready to give up the matter as desperate, or at least to abate of those confident and reverent thoughts of Divine justice which we owe him. However things go, this ought to be fixed in our hearts, that he that sits in heaven judgeth righteously, and executes that his righteous judgment in the fittest season.' Meanwhile 'under the altar those that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held, cry with a loud voice—"How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?"' * And such a cry is not made in vain. The dispensations of the Lord plainly show, "that it is a righteous thing with him to recompense tribulation to them that trouble" his people, "and to them that are troubled rest." † Some there are in the church of God, who have probably been little exercised with trials of "cruel mockings" ‡ and bitter persecutions. Yet it will be well for such to study these verses with thankfulness to God for the exemption from this "hardness" § which hitherto has been mercifully allotted to them. But if they have not yet been summoned into the field of conflict, let them prepare for it. Let none of us, in the determination to "live godly in Christ Jesus," expect to escape "persecution." ¶ Let us "count the cost" ¶ of suffering for Christ, whether we shall be able to abide it. For the mere spiritless notions, or for the unenlivened forms of religion, of which we have never felt the power, nor tasted the sweetness, it would be little worth our while to expose ourselves to the slightest inconvenience. But if we have ever understood the grand substantial of the gospel—if we have ever clearly been assured of their reality, practically acknowledged their influence, and experimentally realized their enjoyment, we shall be ready to meet the persecuting malice of the proud in defence of a treasure dearer to us than life itself. Should we, however, be too rich to part with all for Christ, or too high in the estimation of the world to confess the despised followers of Jesus, it will be no marvel, or rather a marvel of mercy, if the Lord should sweep away our riches, and suffer "the proud

* Rev. vi. 9—11. † 2 Thess. i. 6, 7. ‡ Heb. xi. 36. § 2 Tim. ii. 3. ¶ 2 Tim. iii. 12. ¶ Luke xiv. 28.

to dig pits for us” and to “have us in derision.” To make this world “a wilderness or a land of darkness” to us may be his wisely-ordained means to turn us back to himself as our portion, to his word as our support, to his people as our choice companions, and to heaven as our eternal rest.

S6. ALL THY COMMANDMENTS ARE FAITHFUL: THEY PERSECUTE ME WRONGFULLY: HELP THOU ME.

In the lengthened duration of the trials of the Lord's people, when the “eyes fail with looking upward,” and the voice of prayer grows faint, in a moment of weakness they may be apt to question the faithfulness of God, as if they should go mourning to the very end of their days—at such a season the recollection of the unchangeableness of God, and of the faithfulness of his word, is brought before the view of faith, by him who delights to show himself “the Comforter of those that are cast down.”* And thus they are enabled to “look up and lift up their heads,” and to “go on their way,” if not “rejoicing,” yet at least with humble acquiescence. Whatever be the exercise of faith and patience, steady dependence upon the Lord will ever be crowned with success. Many occasions of temporal difficulty are upon record in the Old Testament histories where this simplicity of faith was beautifully illustrated and “openly rewarded.”† Not indeed that any past successes can ever make us otherwise than utterly helpless in ourselves. When Asa's “hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob,” “his bow abode in strength.”‡ When, at a subsequent period, he “trusted in man, and made flesh his arm, and his heart departed from the Lord,”§ he became, like Samson, “weak, and as another man.”|| Prosperity, therefore, is only to be found in the way of simple reliance on the faithfulness of the Lord's word, leaving our cause in his hands, and looking upward, in the simplicity of wretchedness, for help—“All thy commandments are faithful;”

* 2 Cor. vii. 6.

† The examples of Asa, 2 Chron. xiv. 10—12, and Jehoshaphat, 2 Chron. xx. 1—30, may be referred to.

‡ Gen. xlix. 24. § Comp. Jer. xvii. 5—8. || Judges xvi. 7, with 2 Chron. xvi. 7.

they persecute me wrongfully; help thou me.” This is the spirit which the believer finds to be his only posture of resistance in his spiritual warfare. Were he to enter the field of conflict without this “shield of faith,” some crevice might be found in his panoply, through which a “fiery dart” would find its entrance, and inflict a poisonous wound. But how can faith be exercised without a distinct acquaintance with the objects of faith? Trust cannot be reposed nor help expected from an unknown God—from an offended God, from a God, whom every day’s transgression has made our enemy. There must then be reconciliation, before there can be help. Those, therefore, who are unreconciled by the death of Christ, are offering their cries for help to a God who does not hear, accept, or answer them. But do we remember any instance of trial or difficulty, when we have been enabled to cast our reliance upon the Lord, and found him wanting to us, or backward to assist us? Perhaps, indeed, we may have returned from the throne of grace without any suitable relief. We have brought our burden and laid it before the Lord. But did we not through fear, distrust, or unbelief, carry it away with us? We brought it to the Lord—but did we leave it with him? Oh, let us remember that when we go to Jesus, we go to a tried, long-proved, faithful friend. Have we not found this the only successful way of fighting? that “the good fight” is the fight “of faith,”* that we are best able to resist our enemy upon our knees, and that such prayers as this—“Help thou me,”—will bring down the strength of Omnipotence upon our side? We might as well expect to crush a giant with a straw, as to enter the spiritual conflict with weapons of carnal warfare. The experience of every trial gives us a clearer view of the help which we are warranted to expect from a faithful God. He does indeed deliver gloriously; and leaves us nothing to do but to stand still, wonder, and praise—“Fear ye not; stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will show you to-day.”†

* 1 Tim. vi. 12. † Exod. xiv. 13, 14.

87. THEY HAD ALMOST CONSUMED ME UPON EARTH; BUT I FOR-
SOOK NOT THY PRECEPTS.

AND why did they not quite consume him? Because "the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him."* "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain."† And why have not our spiritual enemies "consumed us upon earth?" "Satan hath desired to have us, that he might sift us as wheat." "But," saith the Saviour, "I have prayed for you that your faith fail not."‡ "My sheep shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand."§ It appears that neither long-continued distress,|| nor determined opposition,¶ could turn the Psalmist's feet from the ways of God. He would rather "forsake" all that his heart held dear upon earth, than "the precepts" of his God. And thus it ever will be with a genuine child of God. With whatever intensity of affection he loves father and mother (and the influence of the gospel upon his heart has increased the sensibilities of his relative affections,) he remembers who hath said—"He that loveth father and mother more than me is not worthy of me."** Whatever "tribulation," therefore, "or persecution ariseth because of the word," to the offence of the unsound professors of godliness,†† *he* has counted the cost of it, and the effect is visible in only serving to confirm his love and adherence to his heavenly Master. When we are tempted to neglect the precepts, or when we fail to live in them, and to delight in them, it would be well to bring our hearts to this test—What would I take in exchange for them? Will the good-will and approbation of the world compensate for the loss of the favour of God? Could I be content to forego my greatest comforts, to "suffer the loss of all things,"‡‡ yea, of life itself,§§ rather than forsake one of the ways of God? When I meet with such precepts as link me to the daily cross, can I throw myself with simple dependence upon that Saviour who has engaged to supply strength for what he has commanded? How often in times of spiritual temptation, if not of tem-

* 2 Chron. xvi. 9. † Psalm lxxvi. 12. ‡ Luke xxii. 31, 32. § John x. 28. || Verse 83. ¶ Verses 84—86. ** Matt. x. 37. †† Ibid. xiii. 21. ‡‡ Phil. iii. 8. §§ Acts xx. 24.

poral danger, "they had almost consumed us upon earth," but "in the mount" of difficulty "the Lord has been seen."* Oh! let each of us mark our road to Zion with multiplied Ebenezers, inscribed Jehovah-jireh—Jehovah-nissit—"By this I know that thou favourest me, because mine enemy doth not triumph over me. And as for me, thou upholdest me in mine integrity, and settest me before thy face for ever."†

What a view does this testimony give of the upholding power of the grace of God! In themselves as weak as worms, how could believers stand against such an appalling array of hostile power? Yet it is a great word, but a true word, and a word for a babe as well as for an Apostle—"I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me."§ Yes, I can "wrestle even against principalities and powers" of darkness, when "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might."||

88. QUICKEN ME AFTER THY LOVING-KINDNESS: SO SHALL I KEEP THE TESTIMONY OF THY MOUTH.

NEED we remind you, believer, that "God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved you, even when you were dead in sins, hath quickened you together with Christ?"¶ But does not daily experience remind you, that you need to be constantly "quickened after" the same "loving-kindness" of your God, else will "the things that remain be ready to die?"** For every breath of prayer that you draw, you need divine influence—"Quicken us, and we shall call upon thy name."†† For the work of praise, without the same influence, you are dumb. Hence the supplication at the close of this psalm—"O let my soul live, and it shall praise thee."‡‡ For the exercise of every spiritual grace there must be the cry—"Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out."§§ So true and humiliating is the confession, that lays us low in the dust, and ascribes all the glory to the Lord—"Not

* In the mount the Lord shall be seen, or shall appear, Jehovah-jireh—Gen. xxii. 14. Scott in loco.

† Exod. xvii. 15. ‡ Psalm xli. 11, 12. § Phil. iv. 13. || Eph. vi. 10, 12. ¶ Eph. ii. 4, 5. ** Rev. iii. 2. †† Psalm lxxx. 18. ‡‡ Verse 175. §§ Cant. iv. 16.

that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God.”* Indeed, our frames, as we are living under, or destitute of, the influence of the Spirit, can scarcely be considered as the frames of the same man—at one time springing to duty as the life of our life—at other times so chained down under the power of corruption, that we seem unable to put forth the feeblest actings of the inward principle of the renewed man. Such a spiritual sloth has benumbed us—so much have we to complain of the backwardness to prayer, and dulness in prayer, of the indulgence of the flesh producing disrelish for heavenly things, of unbelief not resisted, or but faintly resisted, that we must often be compelled to give utterance to the prayer—“Quicken me after thy loving-kindness.” We are not unfrequently detained in this dull and heavy frame by a spirit of self-confidence, expecting our recovery from it by some more determined resolutions of our own, or some increased improvement of the various means of grace. Let these means indeed be used with all diligence, but let not the conviction be wanting, that all means, all instruments, all helps of every kind, without the influence of the Spirit of grace, are dead. “It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing.”†

These records of David’s prayers are of great importance, as marking out the power and encouragement for the service of God. Do we desire to “keep the testimony of his mouth?” Do we mourn over our own short-comings in our work of obedience, and for our own sake, for the Lord’s sake, for the church’s and the world’s sake, sigh for a revival in our souls? Then let our petitions be incessant, each one for himself—“Quicken me”—Quicken this slothful heart of mine. Enkindle afresh the sacred spark within, and let me be all alive for thee.’ Only let faith be kept alive and active at the throne of grace, and all will be alive; our obligations will be deeply felt, and practically acknowledged. If, however, any consideration should be needed to give strength to our obligations, let us remark the title here given to the directory of our duty—“The testimony of God’s mouth.” Thus let every word we read or hear be regarded as coming directly from

* 2 Cor. iii. 5.

† John vi. 63.

the "mouth of God."* What reverence! what implicit submission does it demand! May it ever find us in the posture of attention, humility and faith! each one of us ready to say—"Speak, Lord! for thy servant heareth;"† and expecting a message from God with immediate application to ourselves.

PART XII.

89. FOR EVER, O LORD, THY WORD IS SETTLED IN HEAVEN.

—90. THY FAITHFULNESS IS UNTO ALL GENERATIONS;
THOU HAST ESTABLISHED THE EARTH, AND IT ABIDETH.

—91. THEY CONTINUE THIS DAY ACCORDING TO THINE
ORDINANCES, FOR ALL ARE THY SERVANTS.

THE view of the Christian should not be confined to his own individual state. He will find it both useful and enlivening to take an extended survey of the operations of God in his creation, and it will lead him, as it here led David, to magnify the attributes of God, and especially that of his unchanging faithfulness. Indeed, when we contemplate a creation in ruins, a world in rebellion against its Maker, all failing of the grand end of their existence, we should be at a loss to account for their continuance, but "because his faithfulness is unto all generations." But how different is the contemplation of the Christian from the philosopher! His is not a mere cold, speculative admiration, but in order that he may discover some new view of the faithfulness of God, as the ground of his own dependence. And he finds the unchangeableness of the word of God a real support to his soul—"Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever. Thy word is true from the beginning, and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever."‡ Every promise rests upon this solid foundation—"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away."§ And if any farther proof of his faith-

* Comp. Judges iii. 20. † 1 Sam. iii. 9, 10. ‡ Verses 152, 160. Comp. 1 Peter i. 25. § Comp. Luke xxi. 28—33.

fulness were needed, we shall find it in the observation that "all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation"*—a token of his covenant with nature, that "while the earth remaineth, seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease"†—and an emblem of his covenant with the seed of David, that he "will not cast them off for all that they have done."‡ In this widely-extended universe, "all are his servants." "The stars in their courses"—"fire and hail, snow and vapours, stormy winds, fulfil his word. He sendeth forth his commandment upon earth: his word runneth very swiftly."§ Man—the child of his Maker||—"created in his image"¶—destined for his glory**—is the only rebel and revolter in the earth. Most affecting is the appeal that God himself is constrained to make concerning him: "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord hath spoken. I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me!"††

But what practical lesson may we derive from this contemplation! It may teach us the end for which we are created—"to be his servants." It may serve to show us the reason "that we are not consumed." "I am the Lord, I change not."‡‡ It should remind sinners how vain are their secret hopes, that God's word will fail of accomplishment—"For ever, O Lord! thy word is settled in heaven." It should remind the Lord's people of the security of their hopes—"Thy faithfulness is unto all generations. For I have said—Mercy shall be built up for ever; thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens."§§ The decrees of the kings of the earth are "settled" on earth, and therefore are exposed to all the variations and weakness of a changing world. They may be revoked by themselves or by their successors, or die away of themselves. Even the boasted basis of the "law of the Medes and Persians that altereth not,"||| is discovered to be an empty sound, and long since has been swept away into oblivion. But while "the word settled" on earth has "waxed old like a garment, and perished," "the word settled in hea-

* 2 Peter iii. 4. † Gen. viii. 22. ‡ Jer. xxxi. 35, 36, xxxiii. 20, 21, 25, 26. § Judges v. 20. Psalm cxlviii. 8; cxlvii. 15. || Deut. xxxii. 6. ¶ Gen. i. 27, v. 1. ** Isa. xliii. 7. †† Isa. i. 2. ‡‡ Mal. iii. 6. §§ Psalm lxxxix. 2. ||| Dan. vi. 8.

ven" is raised above all the revolutions of the universe, and remaineth as the throne of God himself—unshaken and eternal—exhibiting the foundation of the believer's hope and of the unbeliever's terror, to be alike unalterably fixed.

But we may also take occasion to remark the foreknowledge as well as the faithfulness of God. From the eternity that is past as well as for the eternity that is to come "thy word is settled in heaven." Before this fair creation was marred, yea, before it was called into existence, its ruin was foreseen, and a remedy provided. "The Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world"* and fore-ordained before† that era. Coeval with this period a people were "chosen in him,"‡ and "for ever the word was settled in heaven"—"All that the Father giveth me *shall come to me.*"§ In regard also to the establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom upon earth, the decree is declared—however earth and hell may combine—"Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion."|| And what a blessed encouragement to perseverance in the grand work of bringing back "the lost sheep of the house of Israel,"¶ and those "other sheep" with them "which are not of this fold"—that we do not depend upon the earnestness of our prayers, the wisdom of our plans, and the diligence of our endeavours, but upon "the word" which "is for ever settled in heaven."

"The Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, *saith the Lord.* As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord—My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, *saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever.*"††

"I have sworn by myself, *the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return,*—That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear."‡‡

* Rev. xiii. 8. † 1 Peter i. 20. ‡ Eph. i. 4. § John vi. 37. || Psalm ii. 6—8. ¶ Matt. xv. 24. ** John x. 16. †† Isa. lix. 20, 21. ‡‡ Isa. xlv. 23.

92. UNLESS THY LAW HAD BEEN MY DELIGHT, I SHOULD THEN
HAVE PERISHED IN MINE AFFLICTION.

How many a false professor has been tried and cast by the hour of affliction. But when the servant of God by his imparted grace has stood firm in this hour—when he has proved himself so “good a soldier of Jesus Christ”* as to choose rather to be “consumed upon earth,”† than to shrink from his profession, it is an earnest that his Saviour will “lift him up, and not make his foes to rejoice over him.”‡ It is the established rule of the kingdom of Christ—“Them that honour me I will honour.”§ And therefore “because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.”|| The nature of the support vouchsafed is—“Not as the world giveth, give I unto you.”¶ Nor can the world conceive the present peace and enjoyment of the soul, bowed down, indeed, and overwhelmed with accumulated afflictions, but to whom God has made his word a delight. There are, perhaps, seasons when the believer’s real character is hidden from the world, but the hour of trial makes it abundantly evident, both what the gospel can do for him, and what a lost creature he would have been without it. Utterly “vain” at such a season “is the help of man”**—as if we should see our friend sinking in the mighty water, while we were standing upon the shore unable to offer assistance. But for the support of the word of God, Jonah, probably, would have “perished in his affliction.” In the belly of the fish, as in “the belly of hell,” he appears to have recollected the experience of David under deep and awful desertion, and in taking the language of the Psalmist out of his mouth, as descriptive of his own dark and terrific condition, a ray of light and hope darted upon his dungeon walls.†† Indeed, we cannot conceive how a sinner can uphold himself in his trials, who knows nothing of the support and comfort of the word of God. We cannot wonder that he should often “perish in his affliction,” “his soul choosing strang-

* 2 Tim. ii. 3. † Verse 87. ‡ Psalm xxx. 1. § 1 Sam. ii. 30. || Rev. iii. 10. ¶ John xiv. 27. ** Psalm cvi. 8.

†† Jonah ii. 3, with Psalm xlii. 7. The phraseology in the lxx. is identical, as if it were a clear and distinct recollection of the Psalmist’s expressions when describing his own state of desertion.

gling and death, rather than life.”* There is, however, no support to be derived even from the word of God, “unless it is our delight.”† The mere form of reading its contents, with whatever diligence and perseverance it may be observed, communicates nothing of its tried consolations. No man ever found himself the better or the happier for the mere performance of the outward duty. It is the spiritual application of its instruction, received in an humble, teachable, prayerful frame, that can alone realize its heavenly support and elevated enjoyment. It is then read as a reality, and taken as a cordial, and the tempest-tossed soul, in casting anchor upon it, cries—“Remember thy word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope.”‡ Each promise of the word is a staff, able, if we have faith to lean upon it, to bear our whole weight of sin, and care, and trial.§ If, then, we are “born to trouble as the sparks fly upward,”|| how important does it seem to lay in a store of supply from this inexhaustible treasury against the time when all human support will be found unavailing. The riches of this treasure, as we have before had occasion to observe, are riches of Christ, and therefore meditation upon those parts of the law,¶ which mark his person,** his character, offices,†† life,‡‡ sufferings,§§ and death,||| resurrection and glory,¶¶ together with the promises and encouragements directly flowing from this blessed subject—should be most of all familiar to our minds, as that field which is, and must be, and ever has been found to be richly furnished with every source of delight and every ground of support.

* Job vii. 15.

† ‘Delights’—instar omnium—instead of all manner of delights.

‡ Verse 49.

§ It was the speech of a holy man—after God had made that sweet place (Matt. xi. 28,) the messenger to open his dungeon of soul-trouble, and bring him into that light of inward joy—that he had better be without meat, drink, light, air, earth, life, and all, than without this one comfortable Scripture. ‘If one single promise’—as Gurnall sweetly remarks, in giving this story—‘like an ear of corn rubbed in the hand of faith, and applied by the Spirit of Christ, can afford such a full satisfying meal of joy to the hunger-bitten pining soul, O what price can we set upon the whole field of Scripture, which stands so thick with promises every way as cordial as this.’—Gurnall on Eph. vi. 17.

|| Job v. 7.

¶ Such as Isaiah liii., which, in the compass of a single chapter, sketches out his whole history. See below.

** Isa. liii. 1, 2. †† Ibid. ver. 4, 5, 12. ‡‡ Ibid. ver. 3. §§ Ibid. ver. 7–9. ||| Ibid. ver. 10. ¶¶ Ibid. ver. 10–12.

93. I WILL NEVER FORGET THY PRECEPTS, FOR WITH THEM THOU
HAST QUICKENED ME.

AN admirable resolution to form! the blessed fruit of what he had just acknowledged of the quickening power of the word in his deep affliction. Some time before, he had mentioned its extraordinary, and, indeed, supernatural efficacy—"Thy word hath quickened me."* Here he most distinctly mentions it as the instrument, not the agent—"With them thou hast quickened me." The commencement of spiritual life in the soul, and whatever liveliness we may feel in the daily exercise of that life, we must trace to the working of the Spirit of God, opening our hearts to understand, love, and live in the way of the Lord's precepts. Else why does not the effect immediately and invariably follow? Why is it that we have to lament that so few are quickened? Perhaps, believer, many around you have heard the word and been privileged with the same opportunities of gracious influence, but unto none of them was the quickening power applied but unto yourself, the most unlikely and unworthy of all.† And have not the precepts since been as "wells of salvation," channels of life, refreshment, consolation to your souls? lively in themselves, and lively to you: working life to all the powers of your soul? Surely then you will say—"I will never forget thy precepts." The leaves of the word of God are the leaves of the tree of life, as well as of the tree of knowledge; not only enlightening the path, but supplying life for daily walk and progress, so that the times when we have been most diligent in our inquiries, meditation and obedience in the word of God, have been uniformly the seasons of our most lively refreshment and consolation. We find persons who are unconcerned about their souls, however prudent and watchful they may be about their worldly interest, and however accurate their memories in storing up any thing that may turn to their temporal advantage, remarkably slow in retaining the truths of God's word. They complain of their short memories, and rest in what they imagine a natural infirmity, although conscious that this excuse does not apply to any other part of

* Verse 50.

† Compare Luke iv. 25, 26.

their character. But what wonder is it, that their memories are so treacherous? The word of God is not precious to them: they own no obligation to it: they have no acquaintance with it. It has no place in their affections, and therefore but little abode in their recollections.

Perhaps, however, the child of God may be needlessly harassed by apparent unfaithfulness to the resolution expressed in this verse, or by repeated failures in his attempts literally to keep it. Often is he distressed by the thought of his want of recollection of divine things, and his inability to preserve an accurate view of what has been presented to his mind. But the benefit of the word must not be estimated by what remains in the memory, so much as by the effect that has been produced upon the heart. The power of the word may have darted through the mind, as a flash of lightning that strikes and is gone, and yet the hardness of the heart may be melted, and the passing flash may have marked a dubious path with a ray that will lead on the humble inquirer to the light of perfect day. If the quickening power remains in the heart, the precepts are not forgotten, even though the memory should have failed to retain them.

But have we not sometimes found the word come with peculiar application either in the way of conviction, direction, or encouragement? Let a special mark be put upon that word with this seal—‘I will never forget thy precepts. It may be of signal use in some hour of temptation. The same Spirit that breathed before upon the word, may breathe again; if not with the same present sensible power, yet with a recollection of the past that will be a ground of seasonable support.’

94. I AM THINE ; SAVE ME ; FOR I HAVE SOUGHT THY
PRECEPTS.

WHAT a high and honourable character is stamped upon the meanest believer in the church of God! the unalienable property* and portion† of his Lord! the “workmanship”‡ of his hand—the purchase of his blood§—given to him by his Father||—“preserved in Christ Jesus, and called.”¶ The evidence of his character is found in “seeking the Lord’s precepts.” It is clearly known “whose we are,” by ob-

* 1 Cor. iii. 23. † Deut. xxxii. 9. ‡ Eph. ii. 10. § Acts xx. 28. 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20. || John xvii. 6, 11. ¶ Jude 1.

serving "whom we serve."* "His servants ye are to whom ye obey."† "Know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself."‡ "The carnal mind is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So, then, they that are in the flesh" can have no natural inclination towards the Lord's precepts.§ Whenever, then, a new bias is introduced into the heart, the influence of which is visible in a renewed life and conduct, we cannot mistake the touch and influence of grace from above, and a seal and stamp of the Lord's interest in us. This may well furnish a powerful plea at the throne of grace—"I am thine; save me." Thou hast saved me, "thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt thou not deliver my feet from falling?"|| Save me from the love of sin, from the daily guilt and power of sin. Save me from the temptations and snares that surround me: from the treachery of my own foolish heart. Save me from all these, and from all besides, which thou seest insnaring to my soul. If I am not thine, what means this desire, this endeavour to "seek thy precepts?" What mean the moments of communion with thee, that I have been privileged to enjoy? What mean the yet unsatisfied desires after a conformity to thine image? Lord, was it not thine own act, thy free and sovereign act, that made me thine? I would humbly plead it. Save me, because thou hast brought thy salvation near to me, and sealed me thine. I need mercy to begin with me: mercy to accompany me; mercy to abide with me for ever. "I am thine; save me." And then, to give irresistible energy to our pleading with God, let us only consider that the object of our supplications was the sole purpose that brought down the Son of God from heaven—"I came down," said he, "from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing."¶ Of this purpose he was enabled to testify at the conclusion of his work. "Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition."** Can we then bring our character to this test, that we "seek his precepts?" Is it the way in which we love to walk? Then let us not desist from our plea before God, until our heart listens to the voice of love, centring every blessing of cre-

* Acts xxvii. 23. † Rom. vi. 16. ‡ Psalm iv. 3. § Rom. viii. 7, 8. || Psalm lvi. 13. ¶ John vi. 38, 39. ** John xvii. 12; xviii. 9.

ation, redemption, and heavenly calling, in the privilege of adoption—"Thus saith the Lord, that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed thee: I have called thee by thy name, *thou art mine. Thou art my servant*: O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me. I have blotted out as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud, thy sins."* I have regarded this thy plea. I have heard this thy prayer—"I am thine; save me."†

95. THE WICKED HAVE WAITED FOR ME TO DESTROY ME; BUT I WILL CONSIDER THY TESTIMONIES.

IN former verses of this most interesting Psalm we find the same danger alluded to, the same refuge sought, and the same support evidently experienced.‡ Indeed this is the constant character of the believer's walk—enduring the enmity of the ungodly world, and seeking his refuge in the word of God—in the resources of peace and the hiding-place of safety to which that blessed word directs him. We need only here remark the striking proof of the irreconcilable variance between the world and God, that whatever may be conceived most contrary to God is encouraged by the spirit of the world, while God's own image in his people is exposed to continual persecution and contempt. Yet the believer finds his strong-hold impregnable, when he turns to the word of God; and while he is ready to say—"My soul is among lions"§—he can testify, to the astonishment of the world—"My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouth, that they have not hurt me."|| He hears, indeed, the roaring of the winds and waves, but he hears also the voice speaking to his agitated mind—"Peace, be still."¶ Perhaps the experience of trial and support here described may furnish a striking illustration of that beautiful promise—"He that believeth shall not make haste."** He whose hope is firmly fixed on that "tried corner-stone," which God himself hath "laid in Zion, as a sure foundation"—"shall not be greatly moved"—nay, he "shall not be moved"†† at all, by the machinations of "the wicked lying in wait" for his destruction. In the hour of approach-

* Isaiah xlii. 1; xliv. 21, 22. † The same plea is urged in prayer, Ps. cxliii. 12; lxxxvi. 2. Margin. Compare also verse 125. ‡ Verses 78, 87. § Psalm lvii. 4. || Dan. vi. 22. ¶ Mark iv. 29. ** Isaiah xxviii. 16. †† Psalm lxii. 2, 6. His confidence seems to have increased, as he recollected his support—"I shall not be *greatly* moved—I *shall not be moved*."

ing difficulty, instead of perplexing himself with successive expedients for his safety (sought more from human contrivance, than from asking counsel at the mouth of God,) he “possesses his soul in patience,” and calmly commits all events to the Lord. Such a man “shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.”* ‘This trust is grounded on the word of God revealing his power and all-sufficiency, and withal his goodness, his offer of himself to be the stay of the soul, commanding us to rest upon him. People wait on I know not what persuasions and assurances; but I know no other to build faith on, but the word of promise, the truth and faithfulness of God opened up, his wisdom, and power and goodness, as the stay of all those that, renouncing all other props, will venture on it and lay all upon him. “He that believes sets to his seal that God is true;” and so he is sealed for God, his portion and interest secured. “If you will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.”†

But it is “the considering of the Lord’s testimonies,” that draws out these blessings of refuge and comfort. There must be the habit of the soul fixed upon them, as “tried words, purified seven times in the fire.”‡ And in this frame of mind the child of God is enabled to say—“I will,” under all distresses, all circumstances of trial, or even of dismay, “consider thy testimonies”—“I will consider” the faithfulness of those blessed declarations—“There shall not a hair of your head perish. Touch not mine anointed.”§ For “he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of mine eye”||—and thus with this armour of defence—this stay of support—I shall not be afraid, even should I hear the “evil tidings,” that “the wicked have waited for me to destroy me.” Or even if I should be destroyed, I know that thy testimonies cannot fail. I know that my rock is perfect—“that there is no unrighteousness in him,”¶ and therefore, “though a host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear, though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident.”** Whether, then, I am delivered from the wicked and “live, I live unto the Lord;” or whether I fall into their snare, and “die, I die unto the Lord,”†† for “I will consider thy testimonies,” and rest assured, that all thy purposes

* Ps. cxii. 7. † Leighton’s Works, iii. 256, 257. ‡ Ps. xii. 6. P. Trans.
§ Luke xxi. 18. Psalm cv. 15. || Zech. ii. 8. ¶ Psalm xcii. 15. ** Psalm
xxvii. 3. †† Rom. xiv. 8.

shall be accomplished concerning me, as thou hast said—"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."* And thus "thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee."†

96. I HAVE SEEN AN END OF ALL PERFECTION: BUT THY COMMANDMENT IS EXCEEDING BROAD.

As the blessed fruit of his "considering the Lord's testimonies," the believer never fails to gain a fresh and deeper insight into their character. He marks them to be stamped with a perfection to which no words or works of man can put in their claim. The world, indeed, in its boasted stores of wisdom and enjoyment, often extorts this confession from its votaries—"I have seen an end of all perfection." "In much wisdom is much grief."‡ Its sources of happiness are equally unsubstantial. After they have feasted on its delicacies, mixed in all its indulgences, and, like the King of Jerusalem, "not withheld from their heart any joy," their judgment pronounces the verdict—"Behold! all was vanity and vexation of spirit."§ How striking is the proof of the reluctance with which the heart turns to God, that the world should be first tried to the very uttermost, before even the cry is heard turning back to him—"Return unto thy rest, O my soul."|| All besides is emptiness—a shadow—a bubble—a nothing. The disappointment, however, of all expectation from the world, will be at once forgotten, when we turn to the "commandment" of God. Here we find our whole duty to our God, our neighbour and ourselves, laid open before us—commanding without abatement, and forbidding without allowance—making no excuse for ignorance, frailty, or forgetfulness. This is "perfection" of which we never "see an end." Every fresh view opens not the extent, but the immensity of the field, and compels us at length to shut up our inquiries with the adoring acknowledgment—"Thy commandment is exceeding broad." Something, however, of its immeasurable latitude is seen, in remarking that it reaches not only to every species of crime, but to every thing tending towards it. Its various parts are formed into one seamless piece, so that no particle can be separated without injury to the whole. As all the curtains of the tabernacle, connected by taches and loops, made but one covering

* Heb. xiii. 5. † Isa. xxvi. 3. ‡ Eccl. i. 18. § Eccl. ii. 10, 11. || Ps. cxvi. 7.

for the ark, and the loosening or disjunction of the smallest point disannulled the fitness of the whole, so it belongs to the perfection of the commandment of God, that “whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.”* The spirituality of its requirements is equally illustrative of its Divine perfection. An angry look is murder,† an unchaste desire adultery,‡ the “stumbling-block of iniquity”§—“covetousness”|| in the heart—is idolatry, the thought¶ as well as the act, the first conception of sin as well as the after commission brings in the verdict—Guilty—Death. Faith is marked as the principle,** and the glory of God as the end†† of all acceptable obedience.

But will the Christian complain of the “exceeding breadth of the commandment?” Will he wish to be subject to a less severe scrutiny—to a more lenient administration? Oh no! He loves it for its extent, and for its purity; and as he has been graciously taught the way to God, and taught to believe in him, who hath stood in his place to “redeem him from its curse,”‡‡ he rejoices alike in the breadth of its requisitions, the comprehensiveness of its obligations, and the narrowness of its liberty for indulgence. And thus the contemplation of it has lost its terrors in the recollection that the gospel of the Saviour meets its full demands. Broad as it may be, the love that has fulfilled it is immeasurable.

But if you, Reader, have learnt the exceeding breadth and spirituality of the law, (the first lesson that is taught and learnt in the school of Christ) your views of yourself and your state before God will be totally changed. Before, you were “thanking God” in your heart “that you were not as other men are.” Now you will be “smiting upon your breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner!”§§ Before, perhaps, you might have thought yourself, “touching the righteousness which is of the law, blameless.” But now you will be ready to glory in your new and more enlightened choice—“What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.”||| Once you considered yourself “alive,” when you were really dead. Now that “the commandment is come” in its heart-searching spirituality and conviction to

* James ii. 10, 11. † Matt. v. 21, 22. Comp. 1 John iii. 15. ‡ Matt. v. 27. § Ezek. xiv. 7. || Eph. v. 5. ¶ Prov. xxiv. 9. Comp. Prov. xxiii. 7. ** Heb. xi. 6. †† 1 Cor. x. 31. ‡‡ Gal. iii. 13. §§ Luke xviii. 9—13. ||| Phil. iii. 6, 7.

your soul, you “die,”* that you may live. Blessed change from the law to the gospel—“from death to life!” “I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.”†

PART XIII.

97. OH! HOW LOVE I THY LAW! IT IS MY MEDITATION ALL THE DAY.

MARK the man of God giving utterance to his feelings of heavenly delight—expressing most by intimating that he cannot adequately express what he desires. Not, however, that he speaks “in the confidence of boasting,” but as if unable to restrain his acknowledgments of divine influence springing up in his heart—“Oh! how love I thy law!” And we need scarcely observe this experience as most distinctive of a spiritual character. The professor may read and understand, and, as far as external regard is concerned, may obey the law; but it is the character of the believer to love it, and to live in it, as if he could not live without it. To the professor it is a task imposed to satisfy conscience. “The veil is upon the heart,”‡ and therefore there is an utter want of all spiritual apprehension, and consequent spiritual delight. To the child of God it is food and medicine, light and comfort, yea, “life from the dead.” If it be a law of precept in the word, it is a “law of liberty,”§ a law of love in his heart. Whatever obedience he had paid it before, was the bondage of fear. But how different is it now that his heart is under the constraint of love! He delights to view it in every lineament. He dwells upon every feature with intense enjoyment. Before it was confinement—his chain. Now it is his pleasure—his ornament. The man is not what he was—“Old things are passed away: behold! all things are become new.”||

And have you, Reader, been led to study it with new eyes and new feelings as contrasted with your former recollections? It is the witness of the Spirit in your heart—the evidence of that important change by which the eyes of the blind have been made to receive their sight. And have not you reason to express your “love” to it when you look how it “testifies” in every part of him, “whom having not seen,

* Rom. vii. 9. † Gal. ii. 19. ‡ 2 Cor. iii. 15. § James i. 25. || 2 Cor. v. 17.

ye love, in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory?"* And then see how love fastens the soul to the beloved object. "*Oh! how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.*"† When you cannot have it in your hand, it will be found, if indeed your soul is in a prosperous state, "hid in your heart." There it is kept as your most precious treasure—while you are living upon it with unwearied appetite as your daily bread, and exercising yourself in it as the rule and guide and principle of your daily walk. Oh! how worthy is it of all the love of the warmest heart! Those who have attained the most extended acquaintance with it, feel their want of suitable enlargement to be a subject of constant and most humiliating regret. The blessing of habitual meditation will spread its influence over every part of our experience, filling our hearts with heavenly matter for prayer—diffusing a sweet savour over our earthly employments—sanctifying the common bounties of Providence‡—realizing the presence of God throughout the day—and commanding prosperity upon our lawful undertakings.§ And when this delight and meditation in the law combine, the character of the man of God is formed in its completeness, symmetry, and attraction—such as the world is often constrained secretly to admire, even where the heart is unready to follow.

Lord! implant in my heart a supreme love to the law. Write it upon my heart—even that new law—"the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus."|| May I love it so that I may be always meditating upon it, and by continual meditation yet more enlarging my love and delight in it. So let it prove a never-failing ever-springing source of heavenly enjoyment and holy conversation!

* John v. 39. 1 Pet. i. 8. 'Were I to enjoy Hezekiah's grant, and to have fifteen years added to my life, I would be much more frequent in my applications to the throne of grace. Were I to renew my studies, I would take my leave of those accomplished triflers—the historians, the orators, the poets of antiquity—and devote my attention to the Scriptures of truth. I would sit with much greater assiduity at my Divine Master's feet, and desire to know nothing but "Jesus Christ, and him crucified." This wisdom, whose fruits are peace in life, consolation in death, and everlasting salvation after death—this I would trace—this I would seek—this I would explore through the spacious and delightful fields of the Old and New Testament.' Such was the testimony of one, who had cultivated the classic fields with no inconsiderable success, and who above most men had enriched his soul with the glorious treasures of the word of God—whose praise is in all the churches as the author of Theron and Aspasio.

† Ps. i. 2. ‡ 1 Tim. iv. 4, 5. § Ps. i. 3. Comp. Jos. i. 7, 8. || Rom. viii. 2.

98. THOU, THROUGH THY COMMANDMENTS, HAST MADE ME WISER THAN MINE ENEMIES; FOR THEY ARE EVER WITH ME.—99. I HAVE MORE UNDERSTANDING THAN ALL MY TEACHERS; FOR THY TESTIMONIES ARE MY MEDITATION.—100. I UNDERSTAND MORE THAN THE ANCIENTS, BECAUSE I KEEP THY PRECEPTS.

HAD not David good reason to love the law of God? and did not he reap a fruitful harvest from his daily meditation in it, when he thus became “wiser than his enemies” in knowledge—than “his teachers” in doctrine—than “the ancients” in experience? Yet he does not speak this to boast of his own attainments, but to commend the grace of God towards him, and the means of grace, by the improvement of which he obtained this wisdom. He does not profess to have gained it by habits of more extensive reading, or by a more accurate and intelligent perception, but simply by a diligent use of the word of God. And even these acquirements which he ventured to call his own, he traces up immediately to the gift of God’s grace in him. “*Thou, through thy commandments, hast made me wiser,*”—in the true spirit of the humbling recollection—“What hast thou which thou hast not received?”*

How much more wisdom does the persecuted believer find from the word of God, than his persecutors have even acquired from the learning of this world! But was “David wiser than his enemies,” or even than “his teachers,” when he dissembled himself to fight against his own people†—or when he yielded to the indulgence of his lust‡—or when in the pride of his heart he would number the people?§ Alas! how often do even God’s children befool themselves in the way of sin! While they rest upon their God, and draw their counsel from his word, they are wise indeed: but when they turn to their own counsel, they become a by-word and an occasion of offence by their own folly. Still, however, the advantage of heavenly wisdom is here most forcibly illustrated, as an encouragement for us to seek for higher attainments in it. And what a condescending instance is it of the character of our God, that there is a path to glory, in which “the way-faring men, though fools, shall not err,”|| and that the simple unlearned

* 1 Cor. iv. 7. † 1 Sam. xxvii. ‡ 2 Sam. xi. § 2 Sam. xxiv. || Isaiah xxxv. 8.

believer, who has the word of God before his eyes, in his heart, and in his life, shall become “perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”* Indeed this spiritual wisdom will ever be found to shed a divine ray of guidance upon the believer’s path, which marks it as the way to God, while the habitual eyeing of the word of God as “a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path,”† will restrain our wandering feet from many a forbidden path. And, as it regards our obedience to the rule of conduct, meditation will prove a most important help and excitement. Its peculiar advantage is, that, while those who “confer with flesh and blood” cannot have their counselors always at hand, in seeking wisdom from the word of God, we have the best Counsellor “ever with us,” to bring all things to our remembrance, and to teach us to make the best of them. We are also thus never without a seasonable word of direction in every emergency—to teach us what to do and what to expect. And this habitual use and walk in the Lord’s testimonies is our sweetest encouragement to “keep his precepts.”‡ For who can set his ways before them, and not feel them to be “ways of pleasantness and paths of peace?”§ If, then, “meditation” has made us familiar with them, we shall delight to walk in them; and in this walk of obedience the Saviour’s presence is enjoyed as the portion of the soul—“Thou meetest him that rejoiceth, and worketh righteousness, those *that remember thee in thy ways.*”§

But may we not turn in, and inquire, what is our daily use of the word of God? Is its influence ever present—ever practical? Do we prize it as a welcome guest? Is it our delightful companion and guide? Perhaps one of the most important means of improving our acquaintance with divine things, and our experience of their power upon our hearts, will be found in constant “meditation” upon this blessed book. We have just noticed its happy influence upon the more public walk of the believer. We may here remark the benefit of this holy study, entering into our secret experience and spiritual exercises. The fruit of it will be evident in the enlargement of our usefulness,|| the inflaming of our love,¶ the strengthening of our

* 2 Tim. iii. 17. † Verse 105. ‡ Prov. iii. 17. § Isa. lxix. 5. Compare John xiv. 21—23. || 1 Tim. iv. 15. ¶ Psalm xxxix. 3.

perseverance,* and the excitement of a praising spirit in our hearts.† While thus bringing our minds into close and continual contact with the testimonies of God, we, may hope to press out the sweetness from the precious volume, and to find it dropping, as from the honey-comb, daily comfort and refreshment upon our hearts.‡

101. I HAVE REFRAINED MY FEET FROM EVERY EVIL WAY,
THAT I MIGHT KEEP THY WORD.

THE advancement in knowledge and spiritual understanding, which the believer finds in “keeping the Lord’s precepts,” makes him most anxious to remove hinderances out of the way. Therefore, he would “abhor that which is evil,” that he might “cleave to that which is good.”§ He would “abstain from all appearance of evil,”|| lest unconsciously he should be drawn into the atmosphere of sin. He would “hate even the garment spotted by the flesh,”¶ as fearing the infection of sin worse than death. And feeling the danger of self-deception, and ignorance of his own ways, he entreats the Lord to “see if there were any wicked way in him.”** Thus he is enabled to maintain an upright walk before a heart-searching God, to “keep himself from his iniquity,”†† and in dependence upon the gospel promises, and in the strength of gospel grace, to “perfect holiness in the fear of God.”‡‡

There are indeed men full of self, and full of the world, who talk of “keeping the word,” when the empty profession which they exhibit to the church, too clearly shows that they know not one step of their duty. Nothing is more certain, from the character and testimony of the word of God, than that, if we have not felt the power of its ho-

* Verses 23, 95. † Psalm lxxiii. 5, 6.

‡ Thus Luther recommends us to ‘pause at any verse of Scripture we choose, and to shake as it were every bough of it, that, if possible, some fruit at least may drop down to us. Should this mode,’ he remarks, ‘appear somewhat difficult at first, and no thought suggest itself immediately to the mind capable of affording matter for a short ejaculation, yet persevere and try another and another bough. If your soul really hungers, the Spirit of God will not send you away empty. You shall at length find in one, and that perhaps a short verse in Scripture, such an abundance of delicious fruit, that you will gladly seat yourself under its shade, and abide there as under a tree laden with fruit.

§ Rom. xii. 9. || 1 Thes. v. 22. ¶ Jude 23. ** Ps. cxxxix. 24. †† Psalm xviii. 23. ‡‡ 2 Cor. vii. 1.

liness upon our own souls, we neither know it nor keep it. And certainly this must be regarded as one beautiful peculiarity in the word of God, that in order to keep it, there must be a separation from sin. The two things are incompatible with each other. They are two services which are at variance at every point, so that the love of sin must depart where the love of God is ingrafted in the heart. But at the same time so strongly are we disposed to every evil way, that it requires a vigorous and continual exercise of grace to refrain from one or another crooked path. Often is the pilgrim (yea, has it not too often happened to ourselves?) stopped and held back in his Christian profession, because the flesh has for a season gained the ascendancy; because a little license has been given to sin, because circumspection has been relaxed in refraining from it. At such seasons the reading of the word has been a mere form, and the privilege of "keeping" it entirely forgotten. We are sensible of a declining delight in those spiritual duties which before were our "chiefest joy." And "is there not a cause?" Has not our gracious God been provoked by finding that we can harbour his enemy in our bosom—nay more—that we plead for indulgence for it? Has not "the Holy Spirit been grieved" by neglect, or by some worldly compliance, so that his light has been obscured, and his comforting influence quenched? No consolations that are found to be consistent with the love and power of sin, can ever come from the Lord. For such is the holiness of the word of God, that it cannot be either spiritually understood, or experimentally enjoyed, but in a consistent Christian walk. And yet, such is the blessedness entailed upon a spiritual interest in this book, that the very expectation of realizing its promises, and of walking in its ways, may operate as a principle of "restraint from every evil way."

But alas! with all the resistance which we are able to offer, evil ways do and will cleave to us. As the only effectual means of "refraining our feet from them," let us seek to abide within a constant view of Calvary. Sin will live every where, but under the cross of Jesus. Here it withers and dies. Here rises the spring of that holiness, contrition, and love, which refreshes and quickens the soul. Here then let us live! Here let us die?*

* "When I am assaulted by some wicked thought, I then betake me to the wounds of Christ. When my flesh casteth me down, by the remembrance

Blessed Lord! "Thou knowest all things." Thou knowest that I "desire to keep thy word." Prepare my heart to receive and to retain it. May I be so habitually "led by the Spirit,"* that I may "live in the Spirit, and walk in the Spirit;"† walking, as my heavenly Master walked, "who was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners."‡ May the slightest deviation from the straight path be marked as an "evil way," and may I have daily grace given to "refrain my feet from" it, as incompatible with "keeping thy word."

102. I HAVE NOT DEPARTED FROM THY JUDGMENTS, FOR THOU
HAST TAUGHT ME.

O MY soul! Art thou not a wonder to thyself? So prone to depart from God! How is it that thou art able in any measure to hold on thy way? The secret of perseverance is revealed in the Lord's word of covenant promise—"I will put my fear in their hearts, that *they shall not depart* from me."§ Man's teaching conveys no strength for the ways of God. It is powerless in advancing the soul one step in Christian progress. The teaching from above is "the light of life"—giving not only the light, but the principle to improve it—not only pointing the lesson and making it plain, but giving the disposition to learn, and the grace to obey. So that now I see the beauty, the pleasantness, the peace, and the holiness of the Lord's judgments, and am naturally led to delight, and insensibly constrained to walk in them. Whether then I am under the teaching of the Lord, or the direction of my own wisdom, will be evidenced by my love or want of love to these judgments, and by my progress or backsliding in the path which they mark before me. I never can depart from sin, from the influence of any human suasion. I shall always be "departing from" the Lord, unless I have the witness within my heart—"thou teachest me."

But, Reader, how has it been with you? What does conscience speak from the records of your experience as to your habit and progress in the "judgments of God?" Though

of my Saviour's wounds, I rise up again. Am I inflamed with lust? I quench that fire with the meditation of Christ's passion.—Christ died for us. There is nothing so deadly that is not cured by the death of Christ.—AUGUSTINE.

* Rom. viii. 14. † Gal. v. 25. ‡ Heb. vii. 26. § Jer. xxxii. 40. Com. 1 John ii. 27.

you may not have been left finally to “perish from the way,” yet does conscience testify that your walk has been consistent, steady, advancing, “in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost?”* Have you been careful to avoid by-paths? Or if you are conscious of no allowed departure from the Lord’s judgments, is it not because you have been enabled to “cease from your own wisdom,”† and in simplicity of faith to plead the promise “written in the prophets—and they shall be all taught of God?” Then do you not find the influence of this heavenly teaching in drawing your heart with a deeper sense of need and comfort to the Saviour? For, as he himself speaks—“every man, therefore, that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.”‡ But what was there in your case of superior virtue or discernment, that would have hindered you from “following the multitude to do evil,” had it not been—“Thou hast taught me?” And he will so teach you, as to put an abiding word into your heart, such as will talk with you, “when you sit in your house, and when you walk in the way,” such as shall be so engrafted in your heart, that “none of your steps shall slide.”§ It shall be such teaching, as shall win you by light and by love, and by conquering power allure and captivate your heart—overcoming the inclination to “depart from” God, with that delight in his judgments, and fear of offending against them, that shall prove an effectual safeguard in the hour of temptation. Then, let it be your care, that the teaching of the Lord be not lost upon you. Let a daily inquiry be instituted as to your proficiency in his instructive lessons. And do not forget to prize his teaching rod, that loving correction, which he so often uses to keep his children from “departing from his judgments,” the efficacy of which David has not long since been calling to mind?||

Lord! do thou lead me by the hand, that I may make daily progress in thy judgments. Restrain my feet from “perpetual backsliding.” Whatever of human instruction may be afforded to me—all will be ineffectual to keep me “from departing from thy judgments,” except thou teach me.—Nor is it any grace received, nor any experience attained, nor any engagements regarded, that will secure me for one moment without continued teaching from thyself.

* Acts ix. 31. † Prov. xxiii. 4. ‡ John vi. 45. § Ps. xxxvii. 31. || Ver. 67.

103. HOW SWEET ARE THY WORDS UNTO MY TASTE! YEA,
SWEETER THAN HONEY TO MY MOUTH!

How varied were the exercises of David in the word of God! And how natural the expression of his heavenly delight in their contents!* Yet was this delight exclusively connected with an experimental interest in this precious portion. For we do not observe that men are in any respect benefited by an external knowledge of divine things. But a spiritual taste is a sure evidence of spiritual health—when the word of God is to us as it was to David, “the joy and rejoicing of the heart,”† and “esteemed more than our necessary food.”‡ The most accurate description of this taste can convey no just idea of the reality. It is impossible by the highest commendation to make the sweetness of honey intelligible to one who has never tasted it. Experience alone can interpret it. “O taste and see that the Lord is good;”§ and having once tasted of his divine goodness, all the poor joys, which before were sweet to the soul, will be found insipid, distasteful, and even bitter. Do we ask, what is it that gives this heavenly unutterable sweetness to the word? Is it not, that it opens an apprehension of the discoveries of faith in the contemplation of the Saviour’s love, and in communion with him in all his glory and grace? “Unto them that believe he is precious.”|| “His name is as ointment poured forth,”¶ and the “savour of the knowledge of him”** brings a reviving to the soul, that nothing besides was ever able to impart. Can the awakened sinner hear, that “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life”††—and not be ready to say—“How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth?” Can the distressed soul listen to the invitation to “all that labour and are heavy laden,”‡‡ and not feel the “sweetness” of those breathings of love? Can the believer hear his Saviour’s voice at the door of his heart, calling him to fresh communion with himself §§—and not turn to him with the expressive acknowledgment of his grateful heart—“All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia out

* Thrice in one short Psalm does he stir up his habit of praise of the word, and of the God that gave it. See Psalm lvi. 4, 10.

† Jer. xv. 16. ‡ Job xxiii. 12. § Psalm xxxiv. 8. || 1 Peter ii. 7. ¶ Can. i. 3. ** 2 Cor. ii. 14. †† John iii. 16. ‡‡ Matt. xi. 28. §§ Rev. iii. 20.

of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad?"* And yet, though this unction and fragrance dwell richly in every page of this word, are there not times, when we complain that reading and meditation extract no honey from it? But have we never felt the same with our natural food? And have we at such times been at a loss to discover the reasons of it? Or have we not immediately explained it by a want of appetite, or by a palate vitiated by former surfeiting? Thus it is with the word. "The full soul loatheth the honey-comb, but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet."†

But how melancholy is the reflection of the multitudes, that hear, read, understand the word, and yet have never tasted its sweetness? Like Barzillai, when unable to "discern between good and evil"—they have no spiritual sense. Full of the world, or of their own conceits—feeding on the delusive enjoyments of creature comforts—nourishing some baneful corruption in their bosoms‡—or cankered with a spirit of formality—they have no palate for the things of God—they are "dead in trespasses and sins." But where the heart is hungering and thirsting after the word, "how sweet is it to the taste!" We eat, and are not satisfied. We drink, and long to drink again. We cannot too highly prize this frame of mind, or be too diligent in cherishing it by habitual watchfulness and prayer, as the spring of our comfortable walk with God. "If so be we have tasted that the Lord is gracious, as new-born babes," we shall "desire the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby."§ We shall take heed of any indulgence of the flesh, which may give a disrelish for this spiritual enjoyment, and cause the soul to "loathe" even "angels' food" as "light bread."|| We shall not rest in our present experience of its sweetness, but shall be daily seeking to attain increasing delight, and a higher relish for the heavenly blessing.¶ And will not this experience be a "witness in ourselves" of the Divine origin of the word? For what arguments could ever persuade us that honey is bitter, at the moment that we are tasting its sweetness? Or who could convince us, that this is the word of man, or the imposture of deceit, when we have felt its blessed

* Psalm xlv. 8. † Prov. xxvii. 7. ‡ See 1 Peter ii. 1, 2. § 1 Peter ii. 2, 3. || Psalm lxxviii. 25. Num. xxi. 5.

¶ *Castæ delicæ mæx sunt Scripturæ tuæ.*—AUGUSTINE.

influence upon our own souls, infinitely beyond what the power of man could impart, as the source of peace, holiness, joy, support, and rest? And, finally, let us remark this frame of enjoyment, as the spiritual barometer, the pulse of the soul—marking most accurately our progress or decline in the divine life. With our advancement in spiritual health, the word will be increasingly “sweet to our taste,” while our declension will be marked by a corresponding abatement in our desires, love, and perception of its delights.

104. THROUGH THY PRECEPTS I GET UNDERSTANDING : THEREFORE
I HATE EVERY FALSE WAY.

CONNECTED with the taste of spiritual sweetness, will be the fruit of spiritual light and direction, manifesting itself especially in a growing discernment of the proper character of the ways of God.* “The sweetness of the lips,” as the wise man observes, “increaseth learning. The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips.”† And as we are thus “filled with the knowledge of” the Divine “will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding,”‡ hence will necessarily follow a constant and irreconcilable “hatred of every false way”—of every way that is contrary to the God we love, and which, however it may be strewed with the flowery “pleasures of sin,” will invariably be found to be “hard”§ in its present walk, and ruinous in its certain end.|| We may know, therefore, whether our knowledge of the gospel is spiritual or merely natural, by marking the way which we love, and in which we delight to walk—whether the “false ways” of our own heart’s choosing, or the way of the cross. And may we not inquire of those, whose past wanderings in the ways of sin justly give weight and authority to their verdict—What is your retrospective view of these ways? Unprofitableness.—What is your present view of them? Shame.—What in the continuance in them must have been your prospect for eternity? “Death.”¶ Rightly then are they called “false ways,” and of those that are found in them it is well said—“This their way is their folly.”** For what indeed can it be but the foolishness of folly, to

* Comp. Prov. ii. 10, 11. † Prov. xvi. 21, 23. ‡ Col. i. 9. § Prov. xiii. 15. || Matt. viii. 13. Phil. iii. 19. ¶ Rom. vi. 21. ** Psalm xlix. 13.

rest in illusive hopes of peace, which can only issue in evils endured and infinitely greater evils foreboded? The blessing then of spiritual knowledge consists in its sanctifying efficacy upon the heart and way—"False ways" are not only avoided and forsaken, but abhorred. However inviting they may appear, yet every deviation into them from the straight path will be "resisted" even "unto blood."*

But let me ask myself, What is my apprehension of the way of sin? Have I detected the "false ways" of my own heart? Little is done in heart religion, until my besetting sins are searched out. And let me not be satisfied with forbearance from the outward act in which they may break out. Let me not forget that sin may be restrained, yet not mortified—that it is not enough that I leave it for the present, but I must renounce it for ever. It would be of little avail to part with it, as with a beloved friend, with the hope and purpose of renewing my familiarity with it at a "more convenient season;"† but let me shake it from me, as Paul shook off the viper into the fire, with detestation and abhorrence.‡ What! can I wish to hold it? If "through the precepts of God I have got understanding," can I find it in my heart to turn away from that voice which speaks—"Oh! do not this abominable thing that I hate?"§ No; rather let me "pluck it out" of my heart, "and cast it from me."|| Oh! for the high blessing of a tender conscience—such as shrinks from the approach, and "abstains from all appearance of evil"¶—not venturing to tamper with any self-pleasing way, but hating it as "false," defiling, destructive. I have marked the apple of my eye, that tenderest particle of our frame, that it is not only offended by a blow or a wound, but that, if so much as an atom of dust find an entrance, it would smart until it had wept it out. Now such may my conscience be, sensitive of the slightest touch of sin—not only fearful of resisting, rebelling, or "quenching the Spirit"—but grieving for every thought of sin, that grieves that blessed Comforter—that tender Friend! To "hate every false way," so as to flee from it, is the highest proof of Christian courage. For never am I better prepared to "endure hard-

* Heb. xii. 4. † Acts xxiv. 25. ‡ Ibid. xxviii. 5. § Jer. xlv. 4. || Matt. v. 29. ¶ 1 Thess. v. 22.

ness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ,"* than when my conscience is thus set against sin. For it is in fact to be ready to submit to the greatest suffering rather than be convicted of unfaithfulness to my God.

Lord! turn my eyes, my heart, my feet, my ways, more and more to thy blessed self.

PART XIV.

105. THY WORD IS A LAMP UNTO MY FEET, AND A LIGHT UNTO MY PATH.

How can a benighted traveller proceed in a dark and dangerous road without a lamp and light, not only to mark his general course, but to direct every successive step? Yet such would have been the state of man without the word of God. And such is his state even with the Bible without faith, without Divine light. The lamp must be lighted, or no reflection will shine upon our path. The word of God must be accompanied with the teaching of the Spirit, or all is "darkness, gross darkness" still. But let us not be content to read the word, without obtaining some light from it, either in our understandings, the frames of our experience, or the path marked out for us by the gracious providence of our God. If we were more habitually waiting to receive, and watching to improve, the light of the word, we should not so often be reduced to complain of the perplexity of our path. The light reflected from this source would in most instances determine our steps under infallible guidance. Yet many circumstances will arise in the course of our experience, when it may be a matter of some difficulty to trace the light in which we are walking to this heavenly source. A promise may seem to be applied to my mind, as I conceive, suitable to my present circumstances. But how may I determine whether it is the lamp of the word of God, or some delusive light from him, who can at any time, for the accomplishment of his own purpose, transform himself "into an

* 2 Tim. ii. 3.

angel of light?" Or if a threatening be impressed upon my conscience, how can I accurately distinguish between the voice of "the accuser of the brethren," and the warning suggestion of my heavenly Guide? In order to ascertain this, or at least to throw some light upon this point, let me inquire into the frame of my own mind under the circumstances alluded to. If I am living in the indulgence of any known sin, or in the neglect of any known duty—if my frame is careless, or my walk unsteady, whatever consoling promise might be presented before my mind with perhaps a sensible impression of comfort, I cannot forbear to suspect it, from its unsuitableness to my case. The light of conviction, rather than of consolation, under the circumstances supposed, would most probably be reflected from the lamp of God. For, though God as Sovereign may speak comfort when and where he pleases, yet we can only expect him to deal with us according to the general prescribed rules of his own covenant, which to his people in a backsliding state threatens chastisement, rather than speaks consolation.* If, however, in an humble, mourning frame, an encouraging word should pass before me, I should have little hesitation in receiving it as the light of God's word, because I should be conscious of that state of feeling in which the Lord has expressly promised to meet his people for the very purpose of their guidance and restoration.† Probably also in the course of the inquiry something might be discovered in the terms and character of the promise, to mark its application to myself. When He that "dwelleth in the high and holy place," engages to dwell "with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit,"‡ if I should be able to discover any symptoms of gracious tenderness within, I cannot mistake in considering this word of promise as sent by my kind and watchful Father, to be "a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Again—Whenever I find the light of the word lead my soul to a distinct and experimental view of the Saviour in his promises, so that he is near and precious to me, and I am enabled to rely on his faithfulness and love, it is sufficiently evident from whence alone this light could have come.§ Or if I find that the purpose for which the

* Compare Psalm lxxxix. 30—32. † Compare Isa. lvii. 18. ‡ Isa. lvii. 15.
§ Comp. 2 Cor. i. 20.

promise appears to be applied, is to answer any proper end—to excite or encourage to any present duty, and that some suitable connexion exists between the duty and the promise, I can scarcely doubt but the lamp of the Lord is directing my dark and difficult path. For example—When the promise was given to Joshua—"I will not fail thee nor forsake thee,"* it was to him, "a word fitly spoken" "in a time of need," and with such evident suitableness to the emergency, that it seemed almost impossible to misconstrue it. And when the same word was subsequently given in a more general acceptation to the Church of God, the application was equally clear, as a dissuasive from inordinate attachment to the things of time and sense, and an encouragement to an entire dependence upon the Lord.† And further, that I may clearly discern the light of God upon my path, let me examine the influence of the promises of God upon my heart and conduct. When the apostle was supported in a moment of extremity with a most unconditional promise of deliverance, the effect produced on his mind was exhibited in a diligent use of all appointed means of safety.‡ When Hezekiah, lying apparently at the point of death, received an *absolute* promise of an addition of fifteen years to his life as a token at once of his obedience to the command, and his faith in the promise, he attended to the prescription given for the recovery of his health.§ When Ezra, and the Jews in his time, received an assurance of Divine protection expressed in the most general terms, upon the warrant of this word, "they fasted and besought their God for this."|| Now in these and similar instances of difficulty, the light evidently showed itself to come from the word of God, by its practical influence in the way of diligence, simplicity, and prayer. Had it proceeded from another source, the assurance of safety and comfort vouchsafed would have been productive of sloth, carelessness, and presumption; and therefore, whenever I am able practically to illustrate the quickening power of the word in an hour of darkness and perplexity, I may truly presume that the light is of God, and that it will be "a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path," "to guide my feet into the way of peace."

* Jos. i. 5. † Heb. xiii. 5. ‡ Acts xxvii. 24, 31. § Isa. xxxviii. 5, 21.
 || Ezra viii. 21—23.

And thus also, with regard to the threatenings of the word, the same test will apply to determine the character and the source from whence the light that dawns upon my path is derived. If I am "walking humbly with my God" in the waiting exercise of faith, and a steady, persevering endeavour to seek conformity to him, I feel warranted in tracing any impression of the threatenings of the word to the suggestion of him, who is ever ready to whisper distrust and despondency to the child of God. But as little hesitation should I have in marking a word of awakening alarm as the light of the word of God, when in a self-confident, self-indulgent frame. It would be well for me in such a frame to be exercised with fear,* not as arguing any insecurity in my state, but as leading me to "great searchings of heart," to increasing watchfulness, humiliation, and prayer. "The commandment is a lamp, and the law is a light, and reproofs of instruction are the way of life."† O that I may be enabled to make use of this lamp, to direct every step of my heavenly way!

Lord! save me from ever turning my face away from the path into which thy word would guide me. Enable me to improve the light afforded me in the constant exercise of faith, prudence, and simplicity.

106. I HAVE SWORN, AND I WILL PERFORM IT, THAT I WILL
KEEP THY RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENTS.

IT would seem as if a simple resolution would prove too weak for the service of God, and therefore we find the Psalmist strengthening it with an oath. Nay more, as if an oath was hardly sufficient security for his obedience, he seconds it with a firm resolution—"I have sworn, and I will perform it." As if he would have said, there shall be but one will between me and my God, and that will shall be his, not mine. Some timid Christians would think it presumptuous to bind themselves under a solemn oath: feeling their liability every moment to break their engagements. And some, perhaps, may have burdened their consciences with unadvised restrictions, or have made fruitless attempts in their own strength. Still, however, when it is a free-will offering, it is a delightful service,‡ well-

* Compare 1 Cor. ix. 27.

† Prov. vi. 23.

pleasing to God.* Such it was in the days of Asa, when “all Judah *rejoiced at the oath, for they had sworn with all their heart*, and sought him with their whole desire, and he *was found of them*.”† The laws concerning vows under the Levitical dispensation, show their binding and acceptable character.‡ Nor is there any reason to suppose that, in the spirit of them at least, they are less binding and acceptable under a dispensation which is marked as “the perfect law of liberty.” A holy promise, originating in serious consideration, and proceeding to a strong and fixed purpose of binding ourselves as with an oath to the service of God, so far from being repugnant to the true spirit of gospel freedom, appears to have been enjoined by God himself as a part of gospel service,§ and to distinguish the character of his people as animating each other in this delightful privilege.|| That some unwary souls have been ensnared by engagements of this nature, however much to be lamented, does not belong to their proper character, nor can it be considered as a legitimate argument against their importance. If Jephthah was entangled in a rash and heedless vow,¶ David appears never to have enjoyed more of the “perfect freedom of the” service of his God, than when binding his soul with a bond equally unalterable, but more advised in its obligation.** And have we who have “the vows

* It is related of Mr. Pearce, by his excellent biographer, that at the period of the first awakening of his mind—‘having read Doddridge’s *Rise and Progress of Religion*, he determined formally to dedicate himself to the Lord in the manner recommended in the seventeenth chapter of that work. The form of a covenant there drawn up he also adopted as his own; and, that he might bind himself in the most solemn and affecting manner, signed it *with his blood*. But afterwards, failing in his engagements, he was plunged into great distress, and almost into despair. On a review of his covenant, he seems to have accused himself of a pharisaical reliance upon the strength of his resolutions, and therefore taking the paper to the top of his father’s house, he tore it into small pieces, and threw it from him to be scattered by the wind. He did not, however, consider that his obligation to be the Lord’s was thereby nullified; but, feeling more suspicion of himself, he depended solely *upon the blood of the cross*.’—Fuller’s *Life of Pearce*, pp. 3, 4. This instance must be considered not as an example of the entangling nature of covenant engagements, but as an illustration, by way of contrast, of the enlightened deliberation and simplicity with which they should ever be undertaken. See some admirable remarks on this subject from Mr. Newton’s pen.—*Life of Grimshawe*, p. 16—18.

† 2 Chron. xv. 12—15.

‡ Num. xxx. 1, 2. Deut. xxiii. 21—23.

§ Isaiah xix. 21. Compare also Isaiah xlv. 5, and Scott on this verse.

|| Jeremiah l. 4, 5. ¶ Judges xi. 35. ** Psalm cxvi. 12—14.

of God upon us”*—baptismal vows—perhaps also confirmation or sacramental vows—found our souls brought into bondage by these solemn engagements? Have we not felt it possible thus to secure our duty without being ensnared by it? Have we not rather found such holy seasons of covenanting with God, and consecrating ourselves to his service, most blessed means of grace for the quickening of our souls in the ways of the Lord, and restraining our feet from devious paths? Probably when we have been enabled to exercise on these occasions a spirit of sincere, humble, and entire dependence on the blood of Christ, to pardon innumerable failures in duty, and to strengthen our hearts for a more devoted fulfilment of our obligations, we have found in transactions of this kind a peace and joy that nothing else in the world could impart; and we may be, at this moment, looking back upon such times as some of the happiest times of our lives. Not but that every recollection will call for the prayer—“Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord.”† But if in this respect we sin, it is still our privilege to remember, and without presumption to believe, that “we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins.”‡ And if we want encouragement to expect necessary grace, there is one who hath said—“My grace is sufficient for thee”§—and that one has given no less a proof of his interest in us, than in dying for us. Confidently, therefore, may we trust that he “will perfect that which concerneth us,”|| that he will “work all our works in us”¶—“to will and to do of his good pleasure.”** Perhaps, however, “a messenger of Satan” may “buffet us”—“thou hast broken thy bond—now will it be worse with thee than before.” But did not Jesus die for sins of infirmity, and even of presumption? Does every failing of the wife annul the marriage covenant? So neither does every infirmity or backsliding dissolve our covenant with God. Rather will it be overruled for the eventual establishment of our interest in this covenant—in a deeper tenderness and increasing simplicity, and circumspection in our walk before him.

But there are cases of no unfrequent occurrence, which have ministered to tenderly scrupulous consciences occasion of most distressing temptation: when, for instance, a

* Psalm lvi. 12. † Ps. cxliii. 2. ‡ 1 John ii. 1, 2. § 2 Cor. xii. 9. || Ps. cxxxviii. 8. ¶ Isa. xxvi. 12. ** Phil. ii. 13.

Christian has been drawn away from a set season of extraordinary devotion, by some unforeseen duty or some unlooked-for opportunity of glorifying God. But as the engagement was or ought to have been formed with an implied limitation of its use, only so far as it might not interfere with the glory of God, or with paramount Christian duty, it cannot be justly considered to be broken by any such providential interference. At the same time let it not be a light matter to remove a free-will offering from the altar of our God. Let godly care be exercised to discover any subtle workings of the indulgence of the flesh in the service of God. Let double diligence redeem the lost privilege of more immediate and solemn self-dedication. Let us indeed beware of legal bondage. But let us not mistake the liberty of the flesh for the liberty of the gospel. Let us be simple and ready for self-denying service, and the Lord our God will not fail to vouchsafe "some token for good."

"Come," then, my fellow Christian, "and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant, never to be forgotten"* by God, never to be forsaken by us. Let each of us be ready to renew our surrender—"O Lord, truly I am thy servant," I make an offer of myself to be thy servant. "Thou hast loosed my bonds:"† and now I come to thee. Oh! bind me to thyself with fresh bonds of love, that may never be loosed. Glad am I that I am any thing, though the meanest of all, that I have any thing, poor and vile as it is, capable of being employed in thy service. I yield myself up to thee, asking that I may be "a vessel meet for the Master's use;"‡ I yield myself to thee with my full bent of heart and will, entirely and for ever.

107. I AM AFFLICTED VERY MUCH ; QUICKEN ME, O LORD, ACCORDING UNTO THY WORD.

It would seem that the course of devoted obedience to which this holy man of God had just pledged himself, was connected with a state of deep and protracted affliction; and the sense of utter helplessness and confidence in the divine promise, which he is led to express in the first moment of need, may serve to convince us, that his covenanting with God was not an act of reliance in his own strength, but un-

* Jer. i. 5.

† Psalm cxvi. 16.

‡ 2 Tim. ii. 21.

dertaken in humility, in the fear of the Lord, and in the evangelical simplicity of faith. At the same time also his determined resolution to keep God's word of obedience appears to have given boldness and encouragement to his pleading that God would perform his word of promise—"I am afflicted very much; quicken me, O Lord, according to thy word." And how high the privilege, that we are permitted to pour our troubles into the ear of One, who is able perfectly to enter into, and to sympathize with us in them; "who knoweth our frame,"* who hath himself laid the affliction upon us,† yea, more than all, who "in all our affliction is" himself "afflicted,"‡ and "suffered being tempted, that he might be able to succour them that are tempted."§ But let us habitually frequent the throne of grace, and cultivate the blessing of communion with our Lord, that we may know the full comfort of this relief in the hour of affliction. And let us not forget what compassion is due to those who are indeed "afflicted very much," whose souls, as they "draw nigh unto death," and know no refuge, are ready to burst with their own sorrows—"the sorrows of the world"—unmitigated—unrelieved—"working death."||

As it regards, however, our own afflictions, the alleviations are such as divest them of the character of punishment, and lead us to reckon them among the choicest and most encouraging instances of the combined wisdom, faithfulness and love of our gracious Father. Need we say that they are infinitely inadequate to our deserts, that they are not without hope, that they are not eternal, and that in the end we shall find that greater comfort was probably vouchsafed in the endurance of them than we even ventured to anticipate from their removal? But perhaps affliction, or at least deep and protracted affliction, may not be our present lot. Yet it is our duty and wisdom to prepare for it; as a good soldier, during the time of truce, is occupied in burnishing his armour for the fight—"Let not him that girdeth on his harness, boast himself as he that putteth it off."¶ "Because the wicked have no changes, therefore they fear not God."** The continual changes therefore in Christian experience may well remind us of

* Ps. ciii. 14. † Ibid. xxxix. 9. ‡ Isaiah lxiii. 9. § Heb. ii. 18. || 2 Cor. vii. 10. ¶ 1 Kings xx. 11. ** Psalm lv. 19.

the necessity of "walking humbly with our God," lest, the hour of trouble finding us in an unprepared frame, we lose the blessing of the sanctified cross. How many of the Lord's dear children may bear the surname of Ephraim—"For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction."* But great affliction is often as hard to bear as great prosperity. And when sorely suffering under the rod, we have most important need of the quickening grace of God to keep us alike from stout-heartedness and dejection. Are we in danger of "despising the chastening of the Lord?"—"Quicken me, O Lord," that I may be preserved in an humble, wakeful, listening posture, to improve the message of thy providence. Are we ready to "faint when we are rebuked of him?"† "Quicken me, O Lord," that I sink not under the "blow of thy hand." Thus under this Divine influence shall we be saved from bringing dishonour upon our God by the workings of our own spirit. We shall receive chastisement of our Father's discipline with humility without despondency, and with reverence without distrust—hearkening to the voice that speaks, while we tremble under the rod that strikes—yet so mingling fear with confidence, that we may at the same moment adore the hand which we feel, and rest in the mercy that is promised. And how consoling in the depths of our affliction is the recollection, that in either case of need we are privileged to plead the word of God as our sure warrant for prayer and expectation—"Quicken me, O Lord, *according to thy word.*" And which of the exercised children of God has ever found "one jot or one tittle of the word to fail?" "Patience working experience, and experience hope, and hope making not ashamed" in the sense of "the love of God shed abroad upon the heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us"—all this abundantly illustrates the answer to the prayer for quickening grace for the encouragement and support of waiting, discouraged souls. "Thou, which hast showed me great and sore troubles, *shalt quicken me again*, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth. Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side."‡

* Gen. xli. 52. † Heb. xii. 5. ‡ Rom. v. 3—5, with Psalm lxxi. 20, 21.

108. ACCEPT, I BESEECH THEE, THE FREE-WILL OFFERINGS OF MY MOUTH, O LORD, AND TEACH ME THY JUDGMENTS.

As the first fruits of his entire self-devotion of himself to the Lord*—as the only service he could render in his affliction—and, as an acknowledgment of the supply of quickening grace received in answer to prayer,† behold this faithful servant of God presenting “the free-will offerings of his mouth” for acceptance. Such he knew to be an acceptable service. For the sacrifices of the Old Testament were not only typical of the One sacrifice for sin, but illustrative of the spiritual worship of the people of God; and in this view frequent allusion is made to them in both parts of the sacred volume.‡ To those who are interested in the atonement of Jesus, there needeth “no more sacrifice for sin.” That which is now required of us, and for which as the Lord’s people we shall be made ready, is to “take with us words, and turn to him, and say unto him—Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously, so will we render the calves of our lips.”§ No offering is accepted but a free-will offering. Such were the offerings of service under the law.|| And such must they be under the gospel. “God loveth a cheerful giver.”¶ Yet neither can this office be accepted, until the offerer himself has found acceptance with his God. “The Lord had respect” first to the person of “Abel”—then “to his offering.”** Yet if our persons are covered with the robe of acceptance—if “the offering up of the body of Jesus Christ once for all”†† has “sanctified” us before God, however defiled our services may be, however mixed with infirmity, and in every way most unworthy, even a God of ineffable holiness can “behold no iniquity”‡‡ in them. No offering is so pure as to obtain acceptance in any other way. No offering so sinful as to fail of acceptance in this way. Most abundant, indeed, and most satisfactory, is the provision made in heaven for the continual and everlasting acceptance of our polluted and distracted services—“Another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it, with the prayers of all

* Verse 106. † Verse 107.

‡ Compare Psalm li. 16, 17. Mal. iii. 3, with Phil. iv. 18. Heb. xiii. 15, 16.

§ Hos. xiv. 2. || Numb. xxix. 39. Deut. xvi. 10. ¶ 2 Cor. ix. 7. ** Gen. iv, 4, 5. †† Heb. x. 10. ‡‡ Numb. xxiii. 21.

saints, upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand."* With such a High Priest and Intercessor, not only is unworthiness dismissed, but boldness and assurance of faith is encouraged.†

But, as we remarked, it was a "free-will offering" that was here presented—the overflowings of a heart filled with the love of God. No constraint was necessary. Prayer was delightful. He was not forced upon his knees. Let me unite with him; let me seek fellowship with him in again presenting myself before my God. Lord! I ought to be thine, and none other's. I desire to tell the world that I am captivated by thy love, and consecrated to thy service. O let me be enabled to "*rejoice, for that I offered willingly*."‡ But let me not forget to supplicate for farther instruction—"Teach me thy judgments," that I may be directed to present a more costly offering, that by more distinct and accurate knowledge of thy ways my love may be enlarged, and my obedience more entire, until I "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."§

109. MY SOUL IS CONTINUALLY IN MY HAND; YET DO I NOT FORGET THY LAW.—110. THE WICKED HAVE LAID A SNARE FOR ME; YET I ERRED NOT FROM THY PRECEPTS.

THIS subject might offer some profitable meditation for those whose health must frequently remind them of approaching danger, or whose familiarity with scenes of war and bloodshed may give peculiar emphasis to the praise, (not indeed of infrequent use in the word of God||)—"My soul is continually in my hand." From the open violence¶ and the secret machinations** of his bitter enemy, David, in the early part of his public life, was much in this frame of continual apprehension. Hunted down "as a partridge in the mountains,"†† and often scarcely escaping the "snare which the wicked laid for him"‡‡—at one time he could not but acknowledge—"There is but a step between

* Rev. viii. 3, 4. † Heb. iv. 14—16; x. 21, 22. ‡ 1 Chron. xxix. 9, 14, 17. § Col. iv. 12. || Comp. Jud. xii. 3. ¶ 1 Sam. xix. 5; xxviii. 21. Job xiii. 14. ¶¶ 1 Samuel xviii. 10, 11; xix. 9, 10. ** Ibid. xviii. 17; xix. 11—17. †† Ibid. xxvi. 20.

‡‡ The men of Keilah, Ibid. xxiii. 11, 12. The Ziphites, Ibid. xxiii. 19; xxvi. 1.

me and death;”*—at another time he was tempted in an hour of unbelief to say—“I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul.”† Subsequently also, when the hand of his own son appeared to be aimed at his throne and his life,‡ this language was aptly descriptive of his state—“My soul is continually in my hand.” Yet does he seem, by his own records, to have been enabled “through much tribulation” to cleave with unshaken adherence to the ways of his God.§

But let us turn to other recorded instances of similar confidence under similar trials. What was the frame of the Apostle’s mind, when “the Holy Ghost witnessed to him in every city that bonds and imprisonment awaited him?” “None of these things”—saith he—“move me. I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”|| He could look “tribulation, or persecution, or peril, or sword,” in the face, and while he “carried his soul continually in his hand”—in true Christian heroism, in the most exalted triumph of faith, he could say in the name of himself and his companions in tribulation—“Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.”¶ Nothing could make him flinch. Nothing could turn him back. Nothing could wring the love of the service of his God out of his heart. Invincible was his principle of love ever found in the hour of trial, not however as a native energy of his heart, but—“*through him that loved him.*” Might he not with strict propriety have said—or did he not speak and live the spirit of this Christian confidence—“Yet do I not forget thy law?”—Let us again take, in the History of Daniel, an instance of the utter impotency of the secret devices of the enemy to produce apostacy in the children of God. When “the wicked,” after many an ineffectual attempt to “find occasion or fault,” were driven to seek for it in “the law of his God,”*** and when in this unsuspected path they “laid a snare for him,” this noble confessor of the faith continued to “kneel upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, *as he did aforetime.*”†† The den of lions was far less fearful in his eyes than one devious step from the straight and narrow path of God.‡‡ Sin was dreaded as worse than a thousand deaths. He surely then

* Ibid. xx. 3. † Ibid. xxvii. 1. ‡ 2^d Samuel 13, 14; xvii. 1—3. § Verse 87. || Acts xx. 23, 24; xxi. 13. ¶ Romans viii. 35—37. ** Daniel vi. 5. †† Ibid. vi. 6—10. ‡‡ Comp. Luke xii. 4, 5.

could have said—"Yet I erred not from thy precepts." And most striking must it have been to David, under circumstances of imminent peril, to have observed the "counsel of Ahithophel"—regarded as oracular, when employed in the cause of God—now, when directed against the church, "turned to foolishness."* But this instance was only "one of a thousand," when the ever-watchful Head and Guardian of his church, "lest any hurt it, keeps it night and day."† Thus in overruling the devices of the enemy for the greater stability of his people's dependence upon himself, "he maketh the wrath of man to praise him,"‡ and "taketh the wise in his own craftiness."§ But the day of difficulty is a "perilous time" in the church. "Many shall be purified, and made white and tried."|| How have we been able to abide? Have we sustained the shock in a consistent recollection, and a steady adherence to the law and precepts of God?¶ This is indeed the time, when genuine faith will be found of inestimable value. It was in such a time, that David, in an especial degree, experienced the blessing of having chosen the Lord for his God. Again and again, when clouds began to gather blackness, and surrounding circumstances to the eye of sense engendered despondency, faith held out the cheering prospect of all-sufficient support, and "David encouraged himself in the Lord his God."*** And is not David's God "our God, the health of our countenance,"†† the guide of our path,‡‡ "the God of our salvation?"§§ Oh! let us not rest till his language is the expression of our own confidence: "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee."|||

It is this daily confidence of faith, that can alone prepare us for the hour of especial need that is approaching to us all. Those, who have never realized the nearness of eternity, can have but a faint idea of the support that is needed in the hour when "flesh and heart fail,"¶¶ to keep the soul in simple dependence upon "the Rock of Ages." "Watch, therefore, for ye know not"**** how soon you may be ready to say—"My soul is in my hand"—quivering on the eve of departure to the Judge. "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning, and ye yourselves like unto men

* Comp. 2 Sam. xvi. 23, with xv. 31; xvii. 14. † Isa. xxvii. 3. ‡ Ps. lxxvi. 10. § Job v. 13, with 1 Cor. iii. 19. || Dan. xii. 10. ¶ Verses 51, 69. Rev. ii. 10. ** 1 Sam. xxx. 6. †† Ps. xlii. 11. ‡‡ Ibid. xlviii. 14. §§ Ibid. lxxiii. 20. ||| Ibid. lvi. 3. ¶¶ Ibid. lxxiii. 26. **** Mark xiii. 35.

that wait for their Lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him *immediately*. Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching; verily, I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.”*

**III. THY TESTIMONIES HAVE I TAKEN AS A HERITAGE FOR EVER;
FOR THEY ARE THE REJOICING OF MY HEART.**

‘PRECIOUS Bible! what a treasure!’ The believer is utterly unable to calculate its price. Such exact suitableness does he find in it to his own case—such direction in the precepts—such wholesome discipline in the reproofs—such divine comfort in the promises—that as they pass before him, he cannot but say—“They are the rejoicing of my heart.” But of little comparative value would they be to him, were it not for the recollection that they are his portion—his “heritage.” And this indeed may account for the affecting indifference with which the world look upon these treasures, and barter them away, as Esau did his birthright,† for something as worthless as a mess of pottage—that they have no present interest in them. Justly, however, are they called the believer’s “heritage.” They are his covenant property, stamped with a seal of “the everlasting covenant.” And how does this view enhance their value—not merely to look at the word of God as the exhibition and tender of the promises of the gospel—but to look at every promise sprinkled with the blood of Christ, as the seal of the blessings contained in it, and the pledge of their performance in the exercise of faith!

Need we, then, entreat you, believers, to value this your heritage—to exhibit to the world, that the promises are not an empty sound—that they impart a divine reality of support and enjoyment—and that an interest in them habitually realized to the soul is a blessed, a heavenly portion? Should your heart, however, at any time be captivated by the transient prospect before your eyes, so that you are led to imagine some substantial value in this world’s treasures, you will have forgotten the peculiar pre-eminent excellence

* Luke xii. 35—37.

† Gen. xxv. 29—34; Heb. xii. 16.

of your heritage—its enduring character—“All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass”—withering and falling away, “but the word of the Lord”—and therefore your “heritage”—in it—“endureth for ever.”* And will you not learn to despise the gaudy follies—the glittering emptiness of this passing scene, in comparison of such prospects—nay, of such present sources of consolation and enjoyment as your “heritage” holds before your eyes? Will you forsake a soul-satisfying and eternal portion, to cast in your lot with the “men of this world, which have their portion in this life,”† and who, having received their consolation,‡ “will soon have spent their all,” and must “begin to be in” infinite, eternal “want?”§ Such as these can have no pleasure in surveying the heritage of the testimonies of God, as having no interest in its character of spiritual and everlasting blessings. If, then, they cast their careless eye across the page, as a drudgery imposed upon them for the quiet of their consciences, what wonder is it if they should find nothing within their view to enliven their hopes, or to attract their hearts? What communion can worldly hearts hold with this heavenly treasure? What spiritual light, as the source of heavenly comfort, can penetrate this dark recess? As well might the inhabitant of the subterraneous cavern expect the cheerful light of the sun, as the man, whose eyes and heart are in the centre of the earth, enjoy the spiritual perception of an interest in the heritage of the people of God. If, however, the darkness and difficulties of the word are pleaded in excuse for ignorance, let it be confessed by these indolent triflers, how small a portion of that perseverance and devotedness of heart, which has been employed in gathering together the perishing stores of this world, has been given to search into this hidden mine of unsearchable riches.

But oh, my soul! if I can lay claim to this blessed heritage, let me not envy the miser his gold—let me rather adore that grace, which has “made me to differ” from him, and made me far happier and far richer in my heritage, than he can ever be in his. Let me be seeking daily to enrich myself from this imperishable store, so that, poor as I am in myself, and seeming to “have nothing,” I may find myself in reality to be “possessing all things.”|| Let

* 1 Peter i. 24, 25. † Psalm xvii. 14. ‡ Luke vi. 24. § Ibid. xv. 14, || 2 Cor. vi. 10.

the recollection of the word, furnishing so rich a heritage of light, comfort, peace, and strength, be my abundant joy and bind my heart to a closer adherence to its obligations, and to a more habitual apprehension of its privileges.

**112. I HAVE INCLINED MINE HEART TO PERFORM THY STATUTES
ALWAY, EVEN UNTO THE END.**

WE cannot wonder at this resolution. When the Psalmist had "taken the testimonies of God as a heritage for ever," and found them to be "the rejoicing of his heart," that he should hold fast this blessed portion, and incline his heart to perseverance in the enjoyment, seems the natural expression of confidence and delight. And yet to "incline the heart to the Lord's statutes" is as much the work of God as to create a world; and as soon could "the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots," as we could "do good, who are accustomed to do evil."* And David was very far from meaning that he had, by any act of his own power, been able to turn the channel of his affections out of their natural course. Often had he made it the subject of prayer;† and, as prayer sets every principle of the soul in action, in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, working in him, and setting him to work, he "inclined his heart to the statutes of God." Weak indeed are our purposes without grace to strengthen them, and fading our resolutions without grace to settle them on a good foundation! yet strength even to "mount upon eagles' wings, to run without weariness, and to walk without fainting"‡—to conflict with difficulties without desponding, and, "having done all, to stand," will always be received in the exercise of "waiting upon the Lord." Conscious that "without Christ we can do nothing"§—"but through Christ all things,"|| let the strength already imparted be exercised, in dependence upon the continued supply from above; and thus with willingness, freedom, and delight, following the Lord, turning to him, and closing with him, we shall "incline our hearts" with the full purpose "to perform his statutes always, even unto the end." This is

* Jer. xiii. 23. † Verses 36, 37. ‡ Isaiah xl. 31. § John xv. 5. || Phil. iv. 13.

God's way of putting quickening life and delightful motion into a soul that was "dead in trespasses and sins," when by an inexpressible sweetness he allures it, and at the same moment by an invincible power draws it to himself. Every step, indeed, to the end will continue to be a conflict with indwelling sin, in the form of remaining enmity, sloth, or unbelief. But how encouraging is it to trace every tender prayer, every contrite groan, every working of spiritual desire, to the assisting, upholding influence of the free Spirit of God?* There will be a continual drawing of the Spirit to give the spring to a continued "following on" in the ways of God. The same hand that gave the new bias to direct the soul in a heavenward motion, will be put forth from time to time to quicken that motion—to "incline the heart even unto the end." And this view will give a bright ray of comfort and support to that hardest of all words in gospel experience—Persevere—"always—even unto the end." I can hardly hold on, the believer might say, from one step to another. How can I then dare to hope that I shall hold on a constant course—a daily conflict—"unto the end?" But was it not Almighty power that supported the first step in your course? And is not the same gracious help pledged to every successive step of difficulty? Doubt not, then, that "He is faithful that hath promised:"† dare to be "confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."‡ And in this confidence go on to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."§

PART XV.

113. I HATE VAIN THOUGHTS: BUT THY LAW DO I LOVE.

"VAIN thoughts" are the natural produce of the unrenewed heart, and of the yet unrenewed part of the believer's heart. Who is there sensible of "the plague of his own heart," and of the spirituality of the Christian

* See Rom. viii. 26. † Heb. x. 23. ‡ Phil. i. 6. § Ibid. ii. 12, 13.

walk with God, that does not constantly complain of their baneful influence? The child of God desires that his "every thought may be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ;"* but he "sees another law in his members, warring against the law of his mind," so that when he "would do good, evil is present with him."† When he would "attend upon the Lord without distraction"‡—when he longs to be able to say—"My heart is fixed, my heart is fixed"§—he finds his affections wandering, as "the eyes of the fool, in the ends of the earth,"|| as if there was no object of Divine attraction to his soul. We do not hear the worldling, or indeed the Christian in his worldly employments, complaining of this burden. He is able to bring to deep, important, and anxious concerns of this world all that intensity and fixedness of attention, which the emergency may demand—assisted possibly rather than hindered in this work by the wily adversary, in the expectation, that this worldly abstraction of thought may prove an occasion of diversion from the immensely momentous and interesting subjects of eternity. But never do "the sons of God come to present themselves before the Lord," except "Satan comes also among them,"¶ interposing in the form of "vain thoughts" every hinderance in his power to the spiritual enjoyment of communion with God. It is probable, that for the most part we are not sufficiently aware of the subtlety, and therefore the peculiar danger of this temptation. An enticement to some open transgression would alarm us. We should instinctively start from it. The incursion of defiling or blasphemous thoughts would be such a burden to us, that we should "have no rest in our spirit," while they remain undisturbed within us. But perhaps neither of these temptations are so formidable as the crowd of thoughts of every kind, incessantly running to and fro in the mind—not actually evil in themselves, yet in their indulgence as effectual to restrain the soul from close intercourse with God, as the most hateful injections. These are "the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the tender grapes."** Sometimes the thoughts may be even spiritual in their nature, and yet "vain" in their tendency; as being unsuitable to the frame of the

* 2 Cor. x. 5. † Rom. vii. 23, 21. ‡ 1 Cor. vii. 35. § Psalm lviii. 7. || Prov. xvii. 24. ¶ Job i. 6. ** Can. ii. 15.

present moment, and calculated, and indeed intended by the great enemy, to divert the mind from some positive duty. Who has not felt a serious thought upon an unseasonable subject, and at an unseasonable time, to be in its effects and consequences a “vain thought”—the secret working of the false “angel of light,”* attempting to divide the attention between two things, that neither of them may be wholly done, done to any purpose, done at all?† If at any time “iniquity has been regarded in the heart”—if the world in any of its thousand forms has regained a temporary ascendancy within—or if the imaginations of a lusting heart are not constantly “held in,” as “with bit and bridle,” these “vain thoughts,” ever ready to force their entrance, will at such seasons “get an advantage of us.” Restless in their workings, they keep no Sabbaths, and can only be successfully met by a watchful and unceasing warfare.

It is, indeed, often difficult in the midst of continued trial from this source, to maintain our evidences of adoption clear and lively, or to “assure our hearts before God.” But the inquiry for our own hearts, as a distinctive mark of Christian sincerity, is—Do we cordially “hate” them, as exceeding sinful in the sight of God‡—hurtful to our own souls,§ and contrary to our new nature?|| If we cannot altogether prevent their entrance, or eject them from their settlement, are we careful not to invite them, not to entertain them, not to suffer them to “lodge within”?¶ us?—

* 2 Cor. xi. 14.

† Greenham (one of the most valuable of the Puritan writers upon experimental exercises) used to bring his distractions of mind to this test—If they brought any past sin to mind for his humiliation, or any comfort to excite his thankfulness, or any instruction suitable to the present moment—he took them to be of God. But if they *drew off his mind from present duty* to rove after other objects, he suspected their source, and girded himself to prayer for increasing steadiness of application to the matter in hand.—See his works. Folio, p. 23.—Being asked to account for distractions in holy meditations, he said, ‘It was either want of preparation and sanctifying the heart by prayer before we set upon so holy an exercise, and therefore a rebuke from the Lord for our ‘presumption in being bold to work upon holy matters in our own strength’—or else a dependence upon a general purpose of thinking good or restraining evil, without fastening our minds upon some particular object, but rather ‘ranging up and down,’ leaving some part of our mind and meditation void for other matters, without wholly and seriously setting on a thing propounded. When any complained to him of blasphemous thoughts, he would say—‘Do not fear them, but abhor them.’

‡ Prov. xxiv. 9. § Can. ii. 15, and Scott in loco. || Rom. vii. 22. ¶ Compare Jer. iv. 14.

Such a hatred and revolting of heart from their influence is a satisfactory proof, that they are not so much the natural suggestion of the heart, as the injections of the enemy of our peace. They are at least so directly opposed to our better will and dominant bias, that we may say—"If I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me."* As far then as they come from within, our affliction and conflict with them show them to dwell there not as welcome guests, or as the family of the house, but as "thieves and robbers." The indulgence of them constitutes our sin. Their indwelling may be considered only as our temptation, supplying indeed continual matter for watchfulness, humiliation, and resistance; yet, as far as they are abhorred and resisted, leaving no stain of actual guilt upon the conscience, and rather to be considered as infirmities than as iniquities. As we attain, however, an increasing sense of the nature of sin, and the extent of duty, we may expect that they will appear before us in deeper aggravations and more persevering opposition; yet, while we groan under their defiling, distracting influence in our best services, and in our most favoured moments of approach to God, we may still commit ourselves with assured confidence to him who "spareth us as a man spareth his own son that serveth him,"† and who will not fail to gather up the broken parts of our prayers, and condescend an answer of gracious acceptance.

Though, however, we may justly conceive ourselves to be secured from condemnation on the account of our vain and wandering thoughts, it becomes a matter of much interest to inquire into the best means by which they may be kept under and brought into subjection. If the seat of this "evil disease that cleaveth to us" be in the heart, there the remedy must be applied. Until the corrupt fountain be cleansed, it must ever "send forth bitter waters."‡ The heart unwashed "from its wickedness," will ever be the inexhaustible receptacle of "vain thoughts." Let it, then, be daily washed in the cleansing fountain of Calvary. Let it be diligently "kept,"|| and carefully filled, so that it may be a "good treasure bringing forth good things."¶ Let there be the continued exercise of that "watchfulness" which is "unto prayer,"** combined with an unflinching

* Rom. vii. 20. † Mal. iii. 17. ‡ Compare 2 Kings ii. 19—22. § Com. Jer. iv. 14. || Prov. iv. 23. ¶ Matt. xii. 35. ** Matt. xxvi. 41.

adherence to the path of plain and obvious duty. Let the temptation to desist awhile from services so polluted, that they appear rather to mock God than to worship him, be met on the onset with the most determined opposition. Such a suggestion, if received, would indeed give the enemy most important advantage, which he would not neglect to improve on every occasion of our approach to God, turning us back from time to time by successive incursions of "vain thoughts" into our perplexed and yielding minds. If we cannot proceed as we could wish, let us proceed as we can. If a connected train of thought or expression fails us, let us only change, not surrender, our posture of resistance, substituting sighs, desires, tears and groanings for words, and casting ourselves upon our God in the simplicity of wretchedness, and yet in the confidence of faith—"Lord, all my desire is before thee, and my groaning is not hid from thee. Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?"* There can be no doubt that it is far better to wander in duty than from it. For if any duty be neglected on account of the defilement that is mingled with it, for the same reason the neglect of every other duty must follow, and, as the final consequence, the worship of God will be abolished from the earth.

Much of our successful warfare will, however, depend upon an accurate and well-digested acquaintance with our own hearts. Much also belongs to a discovery of the bias of the mind in our unoccupied moments—of the peculiar seasons and circumstances that give most power to temptation, that a double watch might be set against those doors, by which the enemy has been accustomed to find his most convenient and unobstructed entrance. Least of all should we forget the effectual means suggested by David's experience—the excitement of our hearts to the love of the law of God. 'He that loves a holy law,' remarks an excellent old writer—'cannot but hate a vain thought.'† If the law be the transcript of the image of God, when the thoughts be affectionately drawn out towards him, it must have a natural tendency to fix the image of the beloved friend upon the mind, and by a sweet constraining influence to fasten down the thoughts to Divine contemplation.

* Psalm xxxviii. 9, lvi. 8. † Steele's Antidote against Distractions.

Are we then ever winged with an elevating love to the Saviour? And shall not we find our hearts starting out from their worldly employments with frequent glances and flights upwards towards the object of our desire? And will not this habitual intercourse and communion of love gradually mould the soul into a fixed frame of delight, exciting our hatred, and strengthening our resistance of every earthly affection? And thus, as the powers of the renewed man are called forth in a "love" for the holy "law of God," "spiritual wickedness" will be abhorred, conflicted and overcome. Yet these defilements will remain, to die with the last breathings of the old man, which though crucified indeed, and expiring, will struggle with fearful strength and unabated enmity to the end. And let them remain, as humbling mementos of our unclean nature, "shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin"*—and as enlivening our anticipations of that blessed place, where "shall in no wise enter any thing that defileth,"†—where "vain thoughts," and whatever beside might "separate between us and our God" will be unknown for ever. And let them not cease to operate, as endearing to our souls the free justification of the gospel, as leading us daily and hourly to repair to "the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness,"‡ and enhancing in our view that heavenly intercession, which provides for the perfect cleansing and acceptance of services even such as ours. Blessed contemplation!—Jesus prays not for us as we do for ourselves. His intercession is without distraction—without interruption. If we are then so dead that we cannot, and so guilty that we dare not, pray, and so wandering under the influence of "vain thoughts," that our prayers appear to be scattered to the winds, rather than to ascend to the God of heaven—if on these accounts combined, we "are so troubled that we cannot speak,"§ yet always is there One to speak for us, of whom it is testified for our encouragement—that there came "a voice from heaven, saying—This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."|| With such hopes, motives, and encouragements, let us continue "instant in prayer,"¶ until we pray, and that we may pray.

* Psalm li. 5. † Rev. xxi. 27. ‡ Zech. xiii. 1. § Psalm lxxvii. 4. || Matt. iii. 17. ¶ Rom. xii. 12.

Let us supplicate with restless importunity the Lord, that the omnipotent power of his love would take hold of these hearts, which every moment sin and Satan seem ready to seize. At the same time let us remember, that while we are conscious of our hatred of every interruption to his service, and of the simplicity of our affection to his holy law, we may at all times maintain a confidence before him, that will issue in perfect peace and established consolation.

114. THOU ART MY HIDING-PLACE, AND MY SHIELD; I HOPE
IN THY WORD.

THINK of the distractions that the Psalmist found in the service of his God, from the unremitting vigilance of the enemy pursuing him into his secret retirement, and defiling his every attempt to perform his obedience, or delight in the enjoyment of his God. Can we wonder, then, to see him fleeing to his hiding-place, where he could “keep himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not?”* But where is the believer’s hiding-place? “A man shall be as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest.”† A man! A wondrous man indeed!—whose “name shall be called the Mighty God;”‡ for “in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.”§ Yes—Jesus exposed himself to the fury of “the wind and tempest,” that he might provide “a hiding-place and a covert” for us. The broken law pursued with its relentless curse—“This sinner ought to die.”—But “thou art my hiding-place and my shield,” who hast “redeemed me from the curse of the law, being made a curse for me.”|| “The fiery darts” pour in on every side, but the recollection of past security in “my hiding-place” and beneath “my shield,” makes me ready with my song of acknowledgment—“Thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall.”¶ From the malice or seductions of the world, abiding in this our hiding-place, we have nothing to fear. The voice of the Saviour still speaks encouragement and support—“Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”** To the accusations of Satan

* 1 John v. 18. † Isaiah xxxii. 2. ‡ Ibid. ix. 6. § Col. ii. 9. || Gal. iii. 10, 13. ¶ Isaiah xxv. 4. ** John xvi. 33.

or of conscience, our challenge is ready—"Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth: Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died."*—From the fear of death—"the sting of death"—we still find our hope secure, and a song of thanksgiving put into our mouth.—"O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."† How is it that "the smoking flax," which the malice of Satan strives to extinguish, is not "quenched"—or "the bruised reed," which seems beyond the hope of restoration, is not "broken," but because Jesus is our security—because hidden springs of life are perpetually flowing from him—because he is our "hiding-place?"

The world must often be surprised at the constancy of the believer amidst all their varied efforts to shake his steadfastness. They know not "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him."‡—A hiding-place implies secrecy.—The believer's life is a hidden life§—hidden beyond the comprehension of the world and the power of the enemy. And therefore it is impossible to tell how safe the Christian is in the midst of surrounding ruin, and how invincible the strength by which he is guarded. If we can look up to the Lord and say—"Thou art my hiding-place and my shield," we may live in the heart of the enemy's country, and "our place of defence shall be the munition of rocks."|| But are we acquainted with this hiding-place? How have we discovered it? Are we found in it and careful to abide in it? "Them that are without, God judgeth." There is but one hiding-place from the wind and tempest. All besides, that seems to promise security, is a "refuge of lies, which the hail shall sweep away, and a hiding-place, which the waters shall overflow."¶ Surely that blessed word, that has discovered the hiding-place, is a firm warrant for the Christian's hope. And therefore every sinner enclosed in the covert of love will be ready to declare—"I hope in thy word."

* Rom. viii. 33, 34. † 1 Cor. xv. 55, 57. ‡ Psalm xxv. 14. § Col. iii. 3.
|| Isaiah xxxiii. 16. ¶ Isaiah xxviii. 16, 17.

115. DEPART FROM ME, YE EVIL-DOERS; FOR I WILL KEEP THE
COMMANDMENTS OF MY GOD.

SAFE and quiet in his hiding-place, David deprecates all attempts to disturb his peace. The society therefore of the ungodly is intolerable to him, and he cannot forbear frowning them from his presence—"Depart from me, ye evil-doers." He had found them to be opposed to his best interests, and he feared their influence in shaking his determination of obedience to his God. Indeed, when have the Lord's people failed to experience such society to be a prevailing hindrance alike to the enjoyment and to the service of God? "Can two walk together except they are agreed?"* And can we be "agreed" with God, so as to walk in fellowship with him, except we be at variance with the principles, the standard, and conduct of a world that is "enmity against him?"† Not more needful was the exhortation to the first Christians than to ourselves—"Save yourselves from this untoward generation."‡ The spirit of the believer's walk must therefore form itself into a resolute course of separation from an ungodly world. Secure in the "hiding place," and covered with the "shield" of his covenant God, he has no need to fear their rebuke, but may meet their malice, and resist their enticements with the undaunted front of "a good soldier of Jesus Christ."§ Not indeed that the profession of the gospel was ever intended to be marked with moroseness of behaviour, or any thing approaching to an ascetic seclusion of conduct. Rather are we expressly enjoined to courtesy and kindness,|| to a wise and considerate walk towards them that are without,¶ as "adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour,"** and having a powerful tendency, in some instances even superior to the word itself†† to "win souls" to Christ. But when they would tempt us to one devious or backsliding step from the ways of God—when our connexion with them entices us to a single act of conformity to their standard, dishonourable to God, and inconsistent with our engagements to his service—then it becomes us to take a bold and unflinching stand—"Depart from me, ye evil-doers; for I will keep the commandments of my God."

* Amos iii. 3. † Comp. Matt. vi. 24. James iv. 4. ‡ Acts ii. 40. § 2 Tim. ii. 3. || Pet. iii. 8. ¶ Col. iv. 5. ** Tit. ii. 10. †† Compare 1 Pet. iii. 1.

The spirit of this resolution, however, gives no countenance to the self-delusive notion of maintaining an intimate connexion with professed "evil-doers," for the kind purpose of recommending our religion to their acceptance—a scheme, which requires a rare degree of caution and simplicity to attempt without entangling the conscience, and which, for the most part at least, it is to be feared, is intended as a specious covering for the indulgence of a worldly spirit. If the world are to be met, and their society invited, for the accomplishment of this benevolent intention, let it be upon the principle of the Lord's command to his prophet—"Let them return unto thee, but return not thou to them."^{*} The amiable desire to "please our neighbour" is guarded from the exercise of it to a worldly purpose or an unlawful extent, by the direct limitation, that it should be "for his good to edification."[†] And whenever this end and restriction has been overlooked in our intercourse with the world, it is sufficiently evident that self-gratification has been the moving, directing excitement, and that the distinctive mark of the Christian character, bearing the cross, and confessing the name of our Divine Master, has been obscured.

Sometimes, however, when the conscience is struggling with itself, an apprehension of danger is not altogether forgotten, and the question is asked with some trembling of spirit—"How far may I conform to the world, without endangering the loss of my religion?" But, not to speak of the insincerity and self-deception, from which such a question originates, it would be better answered by substituting another in its place—"How far may I be separate from the world, and yet be destitute of the vital principle?" Scrutinize, in every advancing step toward the world, the workings of your own heart. Suspect its reasonings. Be ready to listen to the first awakened conviction of conscience. Though it be only a whisper, or a hint, it may be generally regarded as the indication of the Divine will. And, as it concerns this particular point of difficulty, let it be remembered that the experiment of conformity to the world, often as it has been tried, has never been found to answer the avowed end. Whatever may be the effect of this compromise in recommending ourselves to the world, no pro-

^{*} Jer. xv. 19.

[†] Compare Romans xv. 2.

gress has been made in introducing our Master to their affections, whose name, whether from unwatchfulness or cowardice on our part, or from the overpowering flow of the world on the other side, has probably, in such society, scarcely passed over our lips with any sensible power of attraction. Indeed, so far from recommending our religion by this accommodation, we have been successful in ingratiating ourselves in their favour, only so far as we have been content to restrain any prominent introduction of our religion to their notice; at the same time, that our yielding conformity to their taste, and habits, and conversation, has virtually sanctioned their erroneous and defective standard of conduct, and tended to deceive them with the self-complacent conviction, that it approaches as near to the scriptural elevation, as is absolutely required. The final result, therefore, of this attempt to conciliate the gospel to those who “have no heart to it,” is, that our own consciences have been ensnared, while they retain all their principles unaltered.

It must surely be obvious that such a course is plainly opposed to the revealed declarations of the word, and can be viewed strictly in no other light, than as bearing the decisive character of unfaithfulness to our great Master. We might ask, also, whether our love to the Lord can be in fervent exercise, while we “love them that hate him?”*—whether our hatred of sin can be active and powerful, while we can find pleasure in the society of those, whose life, “without God in the world,”† is none other than a habitual wilful course of rebellion against him?‡—whether we can have any deep and experimental sense of our own weakness when thus venturing into temptation—whether, by unnecessary contact with the world, we can expect to “go upon hot coals,” and our “feet not be burned”§—or, in fact, whether we are not forgetting the dictates of common prudence, in forsaking the path of safety for a slippery path, more accordant to our own inclinations?

But, supposing the path of duty not to be determined with infallible certainty by the light of Scripture, let this line of conduct be subjected to the impartial scrutiny of our own hearts, and of the effects, whether neutral or positively detri-

* 2 Chron. xix. 2. † Eph. ii. 12.

‡ Who are the wicked, but those that forget God? Ps. ix. 17; x. 4.

§ Prov. vi. 28.

mental, which have resulted from it to ourselves, or to the church of God. Has not this fellowship with "evil-doers" been felt to be a hinderance to us in "keeping the commandments of our God?" Or, if it has not been found to end in every case in open conformity to their maxims, or is not conceived, as we have apprehended, to give a sanction to their principles, yet has no unfavourable influence been experienced by ourselves in deadening the soul to spiritual things? Has the spirit of prayer sustained no injury in this atmosphere? Has no danger been marked in imbibing their taste, the spirit of their conversation, and their general conduct, which, without fixing any blot upon our external profession, must insensibly estrange the best affections of the heart from God? And has it never been considered that this association with the worldly must prove of a hurtful tendency to the gospel, as weakening, by our apparent want of decision "on the Lord's side,"* the sacred cause which we are pledged to support, and obscuring the strong, legible view of the Christian character exhibited in the word of God, as a distinct and separate people?† As far as Providence marks our path, we go safely in the spirit of humility, watchfulness, and prayer—as far as a connexion with evil-doers is found to be a cross, it is not likely to prove a snare;—but if we can manifest a union of spirit with them to whom David says, with holy determination—"Depart from me"—and to whom David's Lord will one day say—"Depart"—‡—is there not a want of fellowship between our spirit and that of the Psalmist, and an essential unfitness for communion with the society of heaven? The children of this world can have no more real communion with the children of light, than darkness has with light.§ As great is the difference between the Christian and the world, as between heaven and hell—as between the sounds "Come, ye blessed," and—"Depart, ye cursed."|| The difference, which at that solemn day will be made for eternity, must then visibly be made now. They must depart from us, or we from God—we cannot walk with them both. 'Defilement,' as Mr. Cecil remarks, 'is inseparable from the world.'¶ We cannot hold communion with God in the indulgence of worldly society, and, therefore, separa-

* Comp. Exod. xxxii. 26. Judges v. 23. Matt. xii. 30. † Compare Numb. xxiii. 9. John xvii. 16. ‡ Matt. xxv. 41. § 2 Cor. vi. 14. || Matt. xxv. 34, 41. ¶ Cecil's Remains.

tion from the world, or separation from God, is the alternative. Which way—which company—is most congenial to our taste? May we have grace to listen to our Father's voice of love—"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing: and I will receive you, and will be a Father to you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."**

116. UPHOLD ME ACCORDING UNTO THY WORD, THAT I MAY LIVE; AND LET ME NOT BE ASHAMED OF MY HOPE.

LEST the Psalmist should seem to have been self-confident in his rejection of the society of the ungodly, and determination to adhere to his God, we find him here, as we have remarked on former occasions,† mindful of his own weakness, and committing himself to the upholding grace of God. Indeed the highest arch-angel before the throne stands only as he is upheld by the Lord, and may unite with the weakest child in the Lord's family in the acknowledgment—"By the grace of God I am what I am."‡ Much more, therefore, must I, pressed as I am on every side with daily conflict and temptation, and conscious of my own weakness and liability to fall, approach to the throne of grace as a suppliant for "grace to help in time of need."§ My plea is the word of promise, "according to thy word"—"As thy days, so shall thy strength be."|| "Fear thou not"—is the language of our upholding God—"for I am with thee—be not dismayed, for I am thy God—I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee—*yea, I will uphold thee* with the right hand of my righteousness."¶ Blessed be the goodness that made the promise, and that guides the hand of my faith, as it were, to fasten upon it. And why do I need the promise? why do I plead it, but "that I may live," that I may know that "life," which is found and enjoyed "in the favour" of God?*** Nothing seems worth a serious thought beside—Nothing else deserves the name of life, but the service and enjoy-

* 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18. † Verses 8, 31. The same frame is marked—Ps. xvii. 4, 5. ‡ 1 Cor. xv. 10. Comp. 2 Pct. ii. 4.

Man's wisdom is to seek
His strength in God alone:
And e'en an angel would be weak,
Who trusted in his own. COWPER.

§ Heb. iv. 16. || Deut. xxxiii. 25. ¶ Isa. xli. 10. *** Ps. xxx. 5.

ment of God. And therefore quickening grace—new life—“life more abundantly” *—let it be the burden of every prayer—the cry of every moment. Thus upheld by the Lord’s grace and living in the comfort of his presence, I hope to feel more and more of the support of my gospel hope. Though I have just before expressed a confident hope in God’s word, though I have been enabled to “make my boast in the Lord,” † as “my hiding-place, and my shield,” yet a sense of continual helplessness leads me earnestly to pray—“Let me not be ashamed of my hope.” And who, indeed, ever was ashamed of the gospel hope? Is not the “stone that is laid in Zion for a foundation,” a “tried stone”—tried in ten thousand instances—tried by thousands and millions of sinners—nay, more, tried by God himself, and found to be a sure foundation? ‡ Yet still, that I may “hold fast the beginning of my confidence,” and “the rejoicing of my hope, firm unto the end,” § I must persevere in prayer—“Uphold me according unto thy word.”—David, when left to feel his own weakness, was “ashamed of his hope”—“I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes.” || At another time, when upheld by the Lord in a season of accumulated trial, it is recorded of him, “that he encouraged himself in the Lord his God.” ¶ Thus it is evident “wherein my great strength lieth,” and how impotent I am when left to myself. And oh! how delightful is the exercise of faith in going to the Strong for strength. There is now no farther perplexity as to the issue of my spiritual conflicts. He who is the author will ever be the upholder of the “hidden life” in his people. It is a part of his own life, and therefore can never perish. The tempter himself will flee, when he marks the poor feeble, fainting soul “upheld according to the word” of his God, and placed in safety beyond the reach of his malice. Not, however, that as I once was ready to hope, my weakness will ever be made strong; but that I shall daily grow more sensible of it, and be able more simply to take hold of infinite everlasting strength as my stay and support.

* John x. 10. † Psalm xxxiv. 2. ‡ Isa. xxviii. 16. § Heb. iii. 6, 14.
 || Psalm xxxi. 22. ¶ 1 Sam. xxx. 6.

117. HOLD THOU ME UP, AND I SHALL BE SAFE; AND I WILL HAVE RESPECT UNTO THY STATUTES CONTINUALLY.

SUCH is my sense of need and peril, that my only refuge lies in "continuing instant in prayer."* I must, therefore, send up one cry after another into my Father's ear for the support of his upholding grace. For not only the consciousness of my weakness, but the danger of the slippery path before me, reminds me, that the safety of every moment depends upon being upheld by Almighty power. The ways of temptation are so many and imperceptible—the influence of it so appalling—the entrance into it so deceitful, so specious, so insensible—my own weakness and unwatchfulness so unspeakable, that I can do nothing but go on my way, praying at every step—"Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." Often, indeed, can I remember, when "my feet were almost gone, my steps had well nigh slipped,"† yet when I have said, "My foot slippeth," I have been enabled to record—"Thy mercy, O Lord, held me up."‡ Most beautiful is the description of this experience in the picture given of the church of old—"Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness *leaning upon her Beloved?*"§ This frame appears to have been familiar to the Psalmist, and aptly delineates his affectionate, though conflicting confidence in his God—"My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand upholdeth me."|| The recollection of this care of his God, from the earliest moments of his life, appears to have supplied encouragement for his present faith, and matter for unceasing praise—"By thee have I been holden up from the womb; thou art he that took me out of my mother's bowels: my praise shall be continually of thee"¶ We cannot wonder, then, that he should find this same confidence a most refreshing channel of support in the contemplation of the remaining steps of his pilgrimage and his prospects for eternity—"Nevertheless"—saith he—"I am continually with thee: thou *hast holden me* by my right hand. Thou *shalt guide* me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory."** And, indeed, the more awake and lively my spiritual apprehensions are, the more conscious I shall be, that the

* Rom. xii. 12. † Psalm lxxiii. 2. ‡ Ibid. xciv. 18. § Can. viii. 5. || Psalm lxiii. 8. ¶ Psalm lxxi. 6. ** Ibid. lxxiii. 23, 24.

Lord is not only providentially, but by the operations of his grace “compassing my path and my lying down,”* “lest any hurt me, keeping me night and day.”† If it be inquired—how the Lord “holds up” his people in this slippery path, the answer is—“Of the fulness of Jesus they all receive”‡ continual supplies of grace to their souls, so that “the life which they now live in the flesh they live by the faith of the Son of God.”§ And, therefore, if I am upheld, it is by the indwelling of the Spirit, whose grace and influence, cherished in my soul, I shall never fail to find an all-sufficient support throughout my dangerous way. And shall I not also experience the dispensations of Providence to be the appointed means of drawing and keeping me near to my God? If prosperity is exposing my soul to danger, and hindering me in the attempt to loosen my heart from the world, may I not trust to the ever-watchful kindness of the Lord to keep me low, and not to suffer me to be at ease in my forgetfulness? If the pleasures of sense, if the esteem of the world, or the good report of the church, are bringing a bewitching snare upon my soul, my God will lead me in the pathway of the cross—in the “valley of humiliation.”

But how clearly is the secret of an unsteady walk laid open! How is it traced to a neglect of leaning upon an Almighty arm! And how fearfully is the danger of self-confidence unveiled! If I am standing by my own strength, very soon shall I be made to feel that I cannot stand at all. No “mountain” seemed to “stand stronger” than Solomon’s. Yet when he became the very “fool” that he describes, “trusting in his own heart”—how quickly was it “moved!”||

Peter, in the foolishness of his heart, thought that he could have “walked upon the water unsupported by the arm of his Lord,” but a moment’s sense of weakness and experience of danger, brought him to his right mind: “and, beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.”¶ Well would it have been for him, if the gracious instance of faithfulness vouchsafed at that moment of peril had effectually rebuked his presumption. We should not then have heard from the same lips that language of most unwarranted confidence in his own power:—“Although all

* Psalm cxxxix. 3. † Isa. xxix. 3. ‡ John i. 16. § Gal. ii. 20. || Com. Ps. xxx. 6, 7. 1 Kings xi. 1—10. Prov. xxviii. 26. ¶ Matt. xiv. 28—30.

shall be offended, yet will not I:—If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise.”* Poor deluded disciple! thou art on the brink of a grievous fall! But let us mark how he was “held up” from utterly sinking—“I have prayed for thee,” said the gracious Saviour—“that thy faith fail not.”† And thus “held” up by the same faithful intercession of my powerful friend (whose prayers are not weak as mine—“nor will he fail or be discouraged”‡—by my continual backslidings,) “I,” too—though in the atmosphere of danger, in the slippery path of temptation—“shall be safe”—safe from an insnaring world—safe from a treacherous heart—safe in life—safe in death—safe in eternity. Thus does an interest in the covenant of grace and the promises of the gospel encourage not presumption—but humility, watchfulness, diligence, and prayer, and all the different actings of faith—the appointed way, in which the Lord “keepeth the feet of his saints.”

Let me not, then, forget either my liability to fall every moment if left to myself, or the faithful engagements of my covenant God to “keep me from falling.” While I recollect for my comfort, that I “stand by faith,” still is the exhortation most needful—“Be not high-minded, but fear.”§ “By faith I stand,” as it concerns God—by fear, as regards myself. As light is composed of neither brilliant nor sombre rays, but of the combination of both in simultaneous action, so every Christian grace is combined with its opposite, “that it may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing.” When, therefore, hope is combined with fear, the result will issue in that genuine, evangelical confidence, in which alone I shall be able to walk safely and closely with God. Let, then, the self-confident learn to distrust themselves, and the fearful be encouraged to trust their Saviour, and in each let the recollection of grace and help vouchsafed “in time of need” lead to the steadfast resolution of unremitted devotedness to the work of the Lord—“I will have respect unto thy statutes continually.” However difficult they may be in their character, self-denying in their requirements, and opposed in their tendency to “the desires of the flesh and of the mind,” I take God as the surety of my performance of them, and I hope to be found in them as the rule of my daily conduct, and

* Mark xiv. 29, 31. † Luke xxii. 31, 32. ‡ Isaiah xlii. 4. § Rom. xi. 20.

as forming the very element of heavenly happiness to my soul.

118. THOU HAST TRODDEN DOWN ALL THEM THAT ERR FROM THY STATUTES; FOR THEIR DECEIT IS FALSEHOOD. —119. THOU PUTTEST AWAY ALL THE WICKED OF THE EARTH LIKE DROSS; THEREFORE I LOVE THY TESTIMONIES.

THE cheerful, grateful determination to “keep the statutes of God continually,” is that which marks the Lord’s people from “the wicked on earth,” who wilfully “err from them.” And, indeed, this difference in character is indicative of that difference of state, by which, in the eyes of God and in the book of his remembrance, they are separated from each other. His own people the Lord has exalted to be “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.”* Even now “he hath made them to sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus”—and they will shortly “be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of their God,”†—while the ungodly “are trodden down as the mire of the streets,”‡ and “put away like dross” from the precious gold. “Reprobate silver shall men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them.”§ This difference the Lord made at the beginning, in his conduct to the first two men that were born unto the world||—and in his selection of Enoch,¶ Noah,** and Abraham†† from the world of the ungodly, “as vessels of honour meet for the Master’s use.”‡‡ In after ages he made the land of Egypt “know, that he put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel”§§—“his own people that should dwell alone, and not be reckoned among the nations”|||—a people whom he had “formed for himself, that they should show forth his praise.”¶¶ And the same difference he has been pleased to make ever since between his people and the world—in their character***—their way†††—their exercises of mind‡‡‡—their services§§§—their privileges|||—and their prospects.¶¶¶ At the day of judgment the separation will be complete—final—everlasting—“when the Son of man

* Rom. viii. 17. † Ephes. ii. 6. Isaiah lxii. 3. ‡ Mic. vii. 10. Mal. iv. 3. § Jer. vi. 30. || Gen. iv. 4, 5. Heb. xi. 4. ¶ Gen. v. 22—24. Heb. xi. 5. ** Genesis vii. 1. †† Ibid. xii. 1—3. ‡‡ 2 Timothy ii. 21. §§ Exodus xi. 7. ||| Num. xxiii. 9. ¶¶ Isaiah xliii. 21. *** 1 John v. 19. ††† Prov. xv. 9. ‡‡‡ Rom. viii. 5. §§§ Prov. xv. 8. |||| Ibid. iii. 32, 33. ¶¶¶ Dan. xii. 2.

shall come in his glory, and all his holy angels, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory; and before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats—And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left; and these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.”* But mark the character of the ungodly—They “err from God’s statutes”—not in their minds through ignorance, but “in their hearts”† through obstinacy. They do not say, ‘Lord, we *know not*’—but—“*We desire not the knowledge of thy ways.*”‡ It is not frailty—but unbelief—not want of knowledge—but love of sin. It is wilful—damnable. Justly, therefore, are they identified with the “wicked of the earth,” and marked out as alike objects of the Lord’s eternal frown—alike expectants of “the vengeance of eternal fire.”

And is not this a solemn word of warning to those “that forget God”—that “they shall be turned into hell?”§ to “the proud”—that in “the day that shall burn as an oven, they shall be as stubble?”||—to the worldly—that in some night of forgetfulness, their soul will be required of them?¶—to “the hypocrites in heart”—that they are “heaping up wrath?”** It is thus, indeed, that the eye of faith discerns, through the apparent disorder and confusion of a world in ruins, the just, holy, and equitable government of God—that though “clouds and darkness are round about him”—yet “righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne.”†† If the wicked seem to triumph, and the righteous to be trodden down under their feet, it shall not always be so—the end‡‡ and “wages of sin are death”§§—“the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.”||| How awful then and almost desperate their condition! “Their deceit is falsehood”—“deceiving and being deceived”¶¶—perhaps given up to believe their own lie—perhaps one or another “blessing themselves in their own heart,” saying, “I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my own heart, to add drunkenness to thirst.”***

* Matt. xxv. 30—33, 46. Comp. iii. 12; xiii. 30. Mal. iii. 16—18.

† Ps. xcv. 10. ‡ Job xxi. 13. § Ps. ix. 17. || Mal. iv. 1. ¶ Luke xii. 19, 20. Dan. v. 30. ** Job xxxvi. 13. †† Ps. xcvi. 2. ‡‡ Rom. vi. 21. §§ Ibid. vi. 23. ||| Psalm i. 5. ¶¶ 2 Tim. iii. 13. *** Deut. xxix. 19.

What then is our duty? The world says—Be quiet—let them alone—that is—“Destroy them by our” indolence and unfaithfulness “for whom Christ died.”* But what does scripture—conscience—nay more—what does common humanity say? “Cry aloud—Spare not.”† Awake the sleepers—sound the alarm—“Now is the accepted time—the day of salvation”‡—and now is the moment to lift up the prayer, and stretch forth the hand for “plucking the brands out of the fire.”§ To-morrow “the door may be shut,” never to be opened more.|| How awful the judgment of being “put away like dross!” Look at Saul¶ when “put away”—going out, to harden himself in the sullen pride and sorrow of his own heart. Hear the fearful doom of Israel—“Son of man, the house of Israel is to me *become dross*, all they are brass, and tin, and iron, and lead, in *the midst* of the furnace; they are even the dross of silver. Therefore, saith the Lord God—Because ye are all become dross, behold, therefore, I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem, as they gather silver, and brass, and iron, and lead, and tin, into the midst of the furnace, to blow the fire upon it, to melt it, so will I gather you in mine anger and in my fury, and I will leave you there, and melt you.”** But how should this justice of the Lord’s proceedings endear his statutes to us! If the Lord were less observant of sin—less strict in its punishment as a transgression of his word—we should lose that awful display of the holiness of the word, which above every other view commends it to our love—“Thy word is *very* pure, *therefore* thy servant loveth it.”††

120. MY FLESH TREMBLETH FOR FEAR OF THEE, AND I AM AFRAID
OF THY JUDGMENTS.

THE justice of God is a tremendously awful subject of contemplation, even to those who have nothing to fear from its terrors. And the believer, in the act of witnessing the exhibition of it in the Lord’s righteous dealings with the wicked of the earth, cannot forbear to cry out—“My flesh

* Comp. Rom. xiv. 15. † Isa. lviii. 1. ‡ 2 Cor. vi. 2. § Zech. iii. 2. Jude 23. || Matt. xxv. 10. ¶ 1 Sam. xxviii. 5—25. ** Ezekiel xxii. 18—20. †† Verse 140.

trembleth for fear of thee.”* Thus were the holy men of old constrained to tremble in the Divine presence, and even to acknowledge a frame approaching to horror of mind—“*Destruction from the Almighty,*” saith holy Job, “*was a terror to me, and because of his excellency I could not endure.*”† The prophet of God appears to have known a similar sensation in the apprehension of the judgments of God—“*When I heard, my belly trembled, my lips quivered at the voice; rottenness entered into my bones.*”‡ And thus, when God comes to “tread down and put away” his enemies for the display of the holiness of his character, and to excite the admiration of his people—those that stand by unhurt and covered cannot but be ready to take up their parable, and say—“*Alas! who shall live when God doeth this?*”§ We cannot see our Father angry—(such is his “terrible majesty”||)—without an awful fear; and it is this trembling in his judgments upon the ungodly, that secures us from the heavy stroke. Those that refuse to tremble shall be made to feel, while those that are “afraid of his judgments” shall be secure—“Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold, and see the reward of the wicked.”¶—“I trembled in myself,” said the prophet, “that I might rest in the day of trouble.”** Even the manifestations of his coming “for the salvation of his people” are attended with all the marks of the most fearful terror—as if his voice would shake the earth to its very foundation—“Thou didst cause judgment to be heard from heaven—the earth feared, and was still, *when God arose to judgment, to save all the meek of the earth.*”†† To distinguish this disposition of godly trembling as the character of the child of God, we need only contrast it with the exhibition of the ungodly—“Where is the God of judgment? Where is the promise of his coming? The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil”‡‡—is the language of a scoffing world—“running upon the thick bosses of his buckler,”§§ instead of “trembling for fear of him.” Such a spirit of “stoutness against the Lord”|||

* ‘A thrilling horror curdles my skin.’ The thing cannot be poetically expressed without periphrasis.—Bishop Horsley.

† Job xxxi. 23. ‡ Hab. iii. 16. § Numbers xxiv. 23. || Job xxxvii. 22. ¶ Psalm xci. 8. ** Hab. iii. 16.

†† Psalm lxxvi. 8, 9. See the effect of a manifestation of the glory of the Saviour to the Evangelist for the purpose of special consolation and support. Rev. i. 17, 18. Compare also Daniel x. 8—17.

‡‡ Mal. ii. 17. 2 Peter iii. 4. Zeph. i. 12. §§ Job xv. 26. ||| Mal. iii. 13.

seems to excite the astonishment of the hosts of heaven, as most discordant to their notes of humble praise—"Who shall *not* fear thee, O Lord?"—is the adoration of the hosts above—"and glorify thy name, for *thy judgments* are made manifest."* And, as if to mark this trembling spirit with most peculiar acceptance, some favourable symptoms of it prevailed to obtain a respite even for wicked Ahab,† and a pardon for the penitent Ninevites.‡ It was this tenderness of heart, that screened Josiah from the doom of his people,§ and that will ever be regarded as an evidence of the favour of the terrible God—For—"to this man," saith he, "will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and *trembleth at my word.*"||

Believers in Christ! rejoice in your deliverance from that "fear which hath torment,"¶ but do not forget to cherish that holy reverential fear of the character and judgments of God, which will form your most effectual safeguard "from presumptuous sins."** The very supposition, that if God had not engaged himself to you by an unchangeable covenant, his eternal judgments would have been your eternal portion, is of itself sufficient to mingle the wholesome ingredient of fear into the most established assurance.—What! can you look down into the burning bottomless gulf beneath your feet, without the recollection—If I were not immoveably fastened to "the Rock of Ages" by the strong chain of everlasting love, here must have been my abode through the countless ages of eternity! If I had not been thus upheld in the right hand of the grace of God, as well as in the left hand of his providence, I might have dropped out of his hand, as one and another not more rebellious than I have fallen, into this intolerable perdition.—O God, "my flesh trembleth for fear of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments." Thus let it not be supposed that the apprehension of the judgments of God is necessarily of a slavish and tormenting character. It is "his saints" who are called to "fear him,"†† and their fear, so far from "gendering unto bondage," is consistent with the strongest assurance,‡‡ nay, even, is its fruit and effect.§§ It is at once the principle of present obedience||| and of final perseverance.¶¶ It is the

* Revelation xv. 4. † 1 Kings xxi. 27—29. ‡ John iii. 5—10. § 2 Chron. xxxiv. 27. || Isaiah lxvi. 2, 5. ¶ 1 John iv. 18. ** Psalm xix. 13. †† Ps. xxxiv. 9. ‡‡ Comp. Hab. iii. 16, with 17, 18. §§ Hebrews xii. 28. ||| Ibid. xi. 7. ¶¶ Ibid. iv. 1.

confession of weakness, unworthiness, and sinfulness, which lays us low before our God. Its use is most important in the regulation of the Christian temper. It is the "bit and bridle," that curbs the frowardness of the flesh, and enables us to "serve God acceptably" in the remembrance that, though in love he is a reconciled Father, yet in holiness he is "a consuming fire."*

Now if we are under the influence of this reverential awe and seriousness of spirit, we shall learn to attach a supreme authority and consideration to the least of his commands. We shall dread the thought of wilfully offending him. The fear of his frown will be far more operative now than the fear of hell was accustomed to be in our state of unconversion. If any are disposed to presume upon their gospel liberty, they will not probably understand this language. Yet is there no humble believer, that will not have observed how intimately "the fear of the Lord" is connected with "the comfort of the Holy Ghost,"† and with his own steady progress in holiness and preparation for heaven.

PART XVI.

121. I HAVE DONE JUDGMENT AND JUSTICE: LEAVE ME NOT TO MINE OPPRESSORS.—122. BE SURETY FOR THY SERVANT FOR GOOD: LET NOT THE PROUD OPPRESS ME.

THERE is something very solemn in the reflection, that God has set up a vicegerent in the heart—an internal judge—who takes cognizance of every thought, every emotion, every act—determining its character, and pronouncing its sentence. This tribunal tries every cause without respect of persons, time, place, or any circumstances, that may be conceived to separate it from other cases under the same jurisdiction. No criminal can escape detection from defect of evidence. No earthly power can hinder the immediate execution of the sentence. The sentence, then, of this awful judge, whether "accusing or excusing,"‡ is of infinite moment. Where the heart is free

* Heb. xii. 29, with 28. † Acts ix. 31. Comp. Mat. xxviii. 8, ‡ Rom. ii. 15.

from allowed iniquity, we have nothing to fear. Conscience sitting on the throne of judgment, speaks peace, favour and acceptance, and though sins of infirmity will remain, defiling every thought and desire and act of the soul, yet, like the motes on the face of the sun in the clearest day, they will have little or no influence to obstruct the cheerful light from shining upon the heart.* Where, also, an habitual integrity of conduct is maintained, the same "answer of a good conscience before God"† will be heard and enjoyed. This testimony of conscience has often been "the rejoicing"‡ of the Lord's people when suffering under unmerited reproach or "proud oppression." They have been enabled to plead it without offence in the presence of their holy, heart-searching God,§ nay, even when, in the near prospect of the great and final account, they might well have been supposed to shrink from the strict and unerring scrutiny of their omniscient Judge.||

There are times, however, when faith is weak, prayer is straitened, and our expectation of sensible support is dark and distant. Now as no "cloud," though it be only "as big as a man's hand," should ever be allowed to pass over our souls without calling us to the investigation of our hearts, let us apply to this verse as a touchstone to discern our real state of experience and walk. Has there been no indulged deviation from strict sincerity and simplicity of conduct? This of itself would be sufficient to explain the partial darkness, that, for a season, may have obscured our sunshine of enjoyment. Has there been an exact walk of righteousness between man and man?¶ In regard to the exercises of courtesy, compassion, forbearance, and forgiveness, and much more, in the actings of trust and fidelity, of duty and obedience, and in the general course of my worldly transactions, let me inquire whether my heart can respond to David—"I have done judgment and justice?" "Beloved, if your heart condemn you not, then have you confidence towards God."** Then may you indeed carry your cause to God, and plead it before him—"Leave me not to mine oppressors. Let not the proud oppress me."

* See 1 John iii. 21. † 1 Peter iii. 21. ‡ 2 Cor. i. 12.

§ Samuel—1 Sam. xii. 3—5. Nehemiah xiv. 14, 22. Job x. 7. David—Psalms vii. 3—6. xviii. 20—24. xxvi. 1, 6. Paul—Rom. ix. 1, and the Apostles—1 Thess. ii. 10.

|| Isa. xxxviii. 1—3. ¶ Matt. vii. 12. ** 1 John iii. 21.

Plead my cause with them. Let my righteousness be made known. Let it be seen that thou "wilt not leave me in their hand, nor condemn me when I am judged. Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait on thee."* But if any deviation from the standard of rectitude has been allowed—if the world have found occasion to charge you as ungodly, because they have proved you unrighteous—then wonder not, that "the consolations of God should be small with you,"† nor expect a return of the Lord's gracious manifestations, until the Achan has been removed from the camp,‡ and by confession to God,§ and reparation to man,|| you have "given glory to the Lord God of Israel."

Nor let it be conceived, that such an appeal as is here made savours of Pharisaical pride. For it may easily be shown, that the highest tone of confidence in integrity is consistent with the deepest prostration of evangelical humility. The difference is infinite between the proud Pharisee and the upright believer. The Pharisee makes the appeal with undisturbed self-complacency and self-righteous pleading. The believer accompanies it with the prayer of the Publican—"God be merciful to me a sinner."¶ A deep consciousness of daily deficiency and defilement constrains him instantly to append the supplication—"Be surety for thy servant for good."** The keen eye of the world may possibly not be able to affix any blot upon my outward profession; but, "if thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?"†† The debt is continually accumulating, and the prospect of payment as distant as ever. I might well expect to be "left to my oppressors," until I should pay all that was due‡‡ unto my Lord. But behold! "Where is the fury of the oppressor?"§§ The surety is found—the debt is paid—the ransom is accepted—the sinner is free. There was a voice heard in heaven—"Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom."||| The Son of God himself became "Surety for a stranger," and "smarted for it."¶¶ At an infinite cost—the cost of his own precious blood—he delivered me from "mine oppressors"—sin—Satan—the world—death—hell. 'It was exacted, and he was made answerable.'*** As Ju-

* Psalm xxxvii. 33. xxv. 21. † Job xv. 11. ‡ Joshua vii. 10—15. § Ibid. vii. 19. || Luke xix. 8. ¶ Luke xviii. 9—13. ** Comp. Psalm xxvi. 11. Neh. xii. 22. †† Psalm cxxx. 3. ‡‡ Matt. xviii. 34. §§ Isa. li. 13. ||| Job xxxiii. 24. ¶¶ Prov. xi. 15. *** Isa. liii. 7. Bp. Lowth.

dah in the place of Benjamin, he was ready to stand in my stead before his Father—"I will be surety for him; of mine hand shalt thou require him."* As Paul in the stead of Onesimus, he was ready to plead before the same tribunal—"If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account—I will repay it."† How important is it to me that this subject should be ever present to my mind! Well, indeed, was it for me that Jesus did not "hate suretyship."‡ Had he refused the vast undertaking, how could I have answered before the bar of God? Or had he consented to have undertaken the office only for those that loved him, again should I have been left without a plea. But when as my Surety he has brought me under his yoke, and made me his "servant," I can plead with acceptance before his throne—"Be Surety for thy servant for good."§ And do I not need such a surety every moment? And need I be told how fully Jesus has performed the Surety's part?—"So that I may boldly say"—"Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died. There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."||

123. MINE EYES FAIL FOR THY SALVATION, AND FOR THE WORD OF THY RIGHTEOUSNESS.

AND do thine "eyes," tried believer, begin to "fail?" So did thy Redeemer's before thee. He, whom thou hast been recollecting as thy Surety, when he stood in thy place, burdened with the intolerable load of thy sin—bearing the weighty strokes of Infinite justice upon his soul—he too was constrained to cry out, "Mine eyes fail, while I wait for my God."¶ Listen, then, to thy deserted Saviour supporting his deserted people with his word of gracious counsel; yea, for this express purpose, "gifted with the tongue of the learned," that he should know how to speak a word in season to you that are weary—"Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant,

* Gen. xliii. 9. † Philemon 18. ‡ See Prov. xi. 15, last clause.

§ Comp. Isa. xxxviii. 14, where the same word is used in the original as in this verse—"Be surety"—"undertake for me." The same plea is also urged: "Let not the proud oppress me." "O Lord, I am oppressed, undertake." The same frame of conflict is marked—"Mine eyes fail for thy salvation," verse 123. "Mine eyes fail with looking upward."

|| Rom. viii. 33, 34, 1. ¶ Psalm lxix. 3. Comp. xxii. 1—3.

that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.”* And is not “the word of his righteousness” a ground of trust and stay? Is it not, like himself, “enduring for ever?”† How blessed then is the thought, that, amidst the incessant variations of frame in Christian experience, our hope is unchangeably fixed? We may, indeed, not always enjoy it, but our salvation does not depend upon any present enjoyment of its consolation. The blessing is as certain, our *assurance of an interest in it is as clear*, when we are brought to the dust under a sense of sin, as when we might “be caught up into the third heaven” in an earnest of glory. In a season of desertion, however, while we maintain a godly jealousy over our own hearts, let us beware of a mistrustful jealousy of God. Distrust will not cure our wound, or quicken us to prayer, or recommend us to the favour of God, or prepare us for the mercy of the gospel. Complaining is not humility. Prayer without waiting is not faith. The path is plain as noon-day. Continue to believe as you can—Wait on the Lord—This is the act of faith, depending on him the act of hope—looking for him, the act of patience—waiting his time, the act of submission, resigned, even if he should not come. Like thy Saviour, in his “agony” of desertion, “pray more earnestly.”‡ Condemn thyself for the sins of which thou art asking forgiveness. Bless him for his past mercy, even if thou shouldst never taste it again. Can he frown thee from his presence? Can he belie his promise to waiting souls?§ Impossible! Nay: while he has taken away the sensible apprehensions of his love, and in its room kindled longing desires for the lost blessing, is not this to leave behind him the token, that if he “be verily a God that *hideth himself*,” he is still “*the God of Israel, the Saviour*?”|| But thus he will try the faith which he hath given. In no other way can its power be illustrated. It is “*the trial of faith*,” and not faith untried, that will be “found to praise, and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”¶ The full consolation of the gospel is the fruit of patient, humble waiting for the Lord, and of earnest desire, conflicting with impatience and unbelief, and at length issuing in a state of child-

* Isaiah i. 4, 10. † 1 Peter i. 25. ‡ Luke xxii. 44. § Isaiah xxx. 18; xlix. 23. || Isaiah xlv. 15. ¶ 1 Peter i. 7.

like submission and dependence. The man who was here giving expression to his longing expectation for God's salvation, was evidently, though unconsciously, in possession of the promise. Nor would he at this moment have exchanged his hope, clouded as it was to his own view for all "the pleasures of sin," or the riches of the world. Although at this moment he appeared to be under the partial hidings of his Father's countenance, yet it is important to observe, that he was not satisfied, as an indolent professor, to "lie upon his face"* in this said condition. His "eyes failed with looking upward"—stretched up with earnest expectation to catch the first rising rays of the Sun of Righteousness beaming upon his soul. He knew, what all Christians know who walk closely with God, that his longing continuance in waiting upon God is invariably productive of the eventful fulfilment of every desire of the heart.†

But, as regards the exercises of our soul in this state, are we sure that we can plead "the word of his righteousness" for the anticipation of the object of our desire? Have we always an express promise applicable to our expectations, and ready to "put God in remembrance"‡ of his word? Possibly we may have been asking not "according to his will,"§ and therefore may have "charged God foolishly,"|| as if he had been unfaithful to his word, when no engagement had been pledged—when we may have been without any warrant to build upon from "the word of his righteousness." If, however, our petition should be found to be agreeable to this word of promise, and faith and patience hold on in submission to his will, we must not, we cannot, suppose that one tittle that we have asked will fail. Whether the Lord deliver us or not, prayer and waiting will not be lost. It is a blessed posture for the Lord to find us in, such as will not fail to ensure his best blessing, even though our request

* Josh. vii. 10.

† Fox tells us of Mr. Robert Glover, martyr at Coventry, two or three days before his death overwhelmed with the prospect of martyrdom, and mentioning to a friend his earnest supplication for the light of God's countenance, yet without any sense of comfort. His darkness continued up to the period of his arriving within sight of the stake, when suddenly his whole soul was so filled with consolation that he could not forbear clapping his hands and crying out, 'He is come—He is come.' He appeared to go up to heaven in a chariot of fire, with little or no apparent sensibility of his cruel death. Was not this the "word of his righteousness" to one whose "eyes failed in looking for it?"—Fox's *Acts and Monuments*, 1555.

‡ Isa. xliii. 26. † 1 John v. 14. James iv. 3. || Job i. 22.

should be denied. A soul-cheering view of the Saviour is in reserve for us, and "the word of righteousness" will yet speak. "This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest, and this is the refreshing."*

But let me bring my own heart to the test of the thriving, though conflicting frame, here described. Am I longing for the manifestation of God? Surely, if I am content with what I already know, it is too plain a proof that I know but very little of the unsearchable depths of the love of Christ, and that I have abundant need to pray for more enlarged desires, and a more tender enjoyment of his gracious presence. If faith is not dead, yet it may be reduced to so low a state, as to act with little of its conquering and quickening vigour. Let me then exercise my soul in diligent, careful, persevering waiting upon God, equally removed from sloth and frowardness—and I shall yet find the truth of that consoling declaration of the word of his righteousness—"Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart."†

124. DEAL WITH THY SERVANT ACCORDING UNTO THY MERCY, AND TEACH ME THY STATUTES.—125. I AM THY SERVANT: GIVE ME UNDERSTANDING, THAT I MAY KNOW THY TESTIMONIES.

A SENSE of mercy, and the privilege of Divine teaching, were the earnest of the Lord's "salvation," for which the eyes of his servant "were failing," and for which he was waiting in dependence upon the sure "word of his righteousness." And, indeed, there are two wants that daily press upon every "servant" of God, and bring him, in the character of a wrestling suppliant, to the throne of grace. As it respects the first of these wants, if there is a sinner upon the earth who needs the special mercy of God, it is his own "servant." For as the Lord sees abundantly more excellence in the feeblest desire of his heart, than in the most splendid external duties of the professor, so he sees far more sinfulness and provocation in the workings of sin in his heart, than in the palpably defective services of professors, or in the open transgression of "the wicked of the earth." Let him scrutinize his motives, thoughts, and affections,

* Isa. xxviii. 12, also xxx. 15.

† Psalm xcvi. 11. The same plea under similar circumstances of conflict is urged, Psalm cxliii. 1.

even in his moments of nearest and happiest approach unto his God, and he will find such defilement cleaving to every offering, with all the aggravations of mercy, light, and knowledge, vouchsafed, that the confession of his soul, when comparing himself with his fellow-sinners, will be—"Of whom I am chief."* And, therefore, if I am a "servant" of God, I can bring my services before him only upon the ground of "mercy," feeling that for my best performances I need an immeasurable world of mercy—pardoning—saving—everlasting mercy—"Deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy."

But then I am ignorant as well as guilty; and yet I dare not pray for divine teaching, much and hourly as I need it, until I have afresh obtained mercy. Mercy is the first blessing, not only in point of importance, but in point of order. I must seek the Lord, and know him as a Saviour, before I can go to him with any confidence to be my teacher. But when once I have found acceptance to my petition—"Deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy"—my way will be opened to follow on my petition—"Teach me thy statutes. Give me understanding that I may know thy testimonies;" that I may know, walk, yea "run in the way of thy commandments"† with an enlarged heart. My plea is the same as I have before urged, and found prevailing ‡—"I am thy servant."

It may be well, however, for me to inquire, who are servants of the Lord, and what it is that constitutes their character. His servants once were engaged for another Master—once lived in an opposite service. But they have been brought under their present yoke by a transforming change upon their souls, by which their members, that before were "servants to iniquity unto iniquity," are now "yielded to God as servants of righteousness unto holiness."§ Such is their character. Their present privileges and their prospects for eternity are glorious. Their Master speaks to them in the language of direction and encouragement—"If any man serve me, let him follow me: and where I am, there shall also my servant be. If any man serve me, him will my Father honour."|| If, then, I am a servant, I can cast myself with confidence upon the mercy of my Lord, and expect to be dealt with according to that mercy. "Nay, I shall

* 1 Tim. i. 15. † Verse 32. ‡ Verse 94. Psalm cxliii. 12. § Rom. vi. 19. || John xii. 26.

be denied nothing that I “ask according to his will.” For he has condescended to call me not “his servant,” but “his friend,”*—yea more—to call himself my brother.†

Lord! “I am thy servant.” I would be thine for ever. I love thy service too well to wish to change it—Yet must I mourn over my dulness, my backwardness in doing thy will, and walking in thy way. O “teach me thy statutes” more clearly, more experimentally. “Give me understanding” to discern their heavenly sweetness, and their holy liberty, that I may live in a more simple and devoted obedience to them, until I come to see thy face, and to be “thy servant” in thy heavenly temple, “no more to go out.”‡

126. IT IS TIME FOR THEE, LORD, TO WORK; FOR THEY
HAVE MADE VOID THY LAW.

THE desire of the Lord’s people for a more spiritual understanding of his revelation, cannot but be accompanied with deep regret, in witnessing the awful neglect and contempt, which that revelation receives from the world. Indeed, it is one of the distinguishing features of their character, that they “sigh and cry for all the abominations of the land”§—that they cannot hear or see the name of God dishonoured, without feeling as for the wounded reputation of their Father and their Friend.¶ They cannot be satisfied with suffering the world quietly to go on their course. They are anxious to throw in their weight of influence,

* John xv. 15. † Ibid. xx. 17. Heb. ii. 11, 12. ‡ Rev. vii. 15; iii. 12. § Ezekiel ix. 4.

¶ What a Christian ought to feel under these circumstances, let us learn from the following extract of the diary of the saintly Martyn. Upon hearing at Shiraz in the course of his disputations some reproach of his Saviour’s name, he writes thus—‘I was cut to the soul by this blasphemy. In prayer I could think of nothing else, but that great day, when the Son of God should come in the clouds of heaven, “taking vengeance on them that know not God,” and convince men of all their hard speeches which they have spoken against him.’ (We might almost think that this verse was upon his mind at this moment.) ‘Mirza Seid Ali perceived that I was considerably disordered, and was sorry for having repeated the words, but asked, what it was that was so offensive. I told him, that I could not endure existence, if Jesus was not glorified; that it would be hell to me, if he were to be always thus dishonoured. He was astonished, and again asked the reason why—‘If any one pluck out your eyes,’ I replied—‘there is no saying why you feel pain? It is feeling. It is because I am one with Christ, that I am thus dreadfully wounded.’ On his again apologizing, I told him, ‘that I rejoiced at what had happened, inasmuch as it made me feel nearer the Lord than ever. It is *when the head or heart is struck, that every member feels its membership.*’—Martyn’s Life, p. 420, 8vo Edition.

whatever it may be, to stem the torrent flowing along them, and, when they find all their efforts unavailing, they carry their cause to the Lord.—“It is time *for thee*, Lord, to work.” Nor does this deprecation contradict the law of love, which requires us to pray for and to bless our enemies.* For the Lord’s people are not angry for their own cause, but for his. David had no regard to his own honour, but to God’s law. He had not injured his enemies. He had laboured to “overcome their evil with good.” He had often prayed for their amendment, and wept for their sins. But all was in vain. “Now, Lord, take the rod into thine own hand. “It is time *for thee*, Lord, to work.”” This was true zeal—zeal of the Spirit, not of the flesh. How gracious is our God in permitting his servants thus to plead with him, and, as it were, to “give him no rest, until”† he shall arise, and “work,” and sit upon the throne of the kingdoms of the earth!

But does “conscience bear us witness,” that we “have done what we could”‡ by personal exertion, and by consistent example, to “come to the help of the Lord against the mighty?”§ And are we upholding the cause by wrestling supplication as well as by active service, reminding the Lord, how tenderly his own honour is connected with the overthrow of the kingdom of Satan in the earth?—“Remember this, that the enemy hath reproached, O Lord, and that the foolish people have blasphemed thy name.”|| Most solemn is the warning to the ungodly—“My Spirit shall not always strive with man.”¶ Often—when the Lord has seen “it time for him to work, when they have made void his law”—have his judgments made the earth to tremble. “Sodom and Gomorrah” have “known the power of his anger,” and are “set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.”** And when his “time to work” is fully come, what is all the resistance of earth and hell, but as “setting the briers and thorns against him in battle?” “I would,”—saith he,—“go through them. I would burn them together.”†† A word—a frown—a look is destruction. He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength. “Who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered?”‡‡ Or “who hath resisted his will?”§§

* Matt. v. 44. † Isaiah lxii. 7. ‡ Mark xiv. 8. § Judges v. 23. || Psalm lxxiv. 18, also verses 10, 11. ¶ Gen. vi. 3. ** Jude 7. †† Isa. xxvii. 4. ‡‡ Job ix. 4. §§ Rom. ix. 19.

But what shall we say of that stupendous instance of the mightiness of his hand, by which, when men “had made void his law”—when no restrictions could bind, no forbearance win them—when he “saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor, therefore his arm brought salvation unto him, and his righteousness sustained him.”* Surely, if we could conceive the angels above to have taken up this expression of ardent concern for the glory of God—“It is time, for thee, Lord, to work, for they have made void thy law”—they could little have thought of such a work as this—they could never have conceived to themselves such an unlooked for display of power, justice, and mercy, meeting in one glorious work. To set at naught then, this work—is it not to refuse all hope—all remedy? To persist in “making void the law” after so magnificent an exhibition of the working of God—must it not expose the transgressors to reap the fruit of their own obstinacy, and to prepare to meet him as their Judge, whom they refuse to receive as their Saviour? Nor must they wonder, if the Lord’s people with a holy indignation against sin, and fervour of zeal for his glory, should appeal to his faithfulness for the fulfilment of his judgments—“It is time for thee, Lord, to work, for they have made void thy law.”

127. THEREFORE I LOVE THY COMMANDMENTS ABOVE GOLD;
YEA, ABOVE FINE GOLD.

THE scorn and reproach, which the commandments of God meet with from the world, serve to enhance their value in the estimation of the Lord’s people. “Gold—yea, fine gold,” the hope, confidence, and idol of the worldling† and the love of which has been the ruin of thousands‡—has no glory in their eyes compared with the word of God. Again and again they are ready to exalt its praises, as “more to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold.”§ “The merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. It is more precious than rubies, and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared to it.”|| The Lord has here unlocked to his people his golden treasure, and enriched their souls from it with “the unsearchable riches of Christ.” Let the image

* Isaiah lix. 16. † Job xxxi. 24. ‡ 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10. § Psalm xix. 10.
|| Prov. iii. 14, 15.

employed bring before us the picture of the miser. His heart and treasure are in his gold. With what delight he counts it! with what watchfulness he keeps it! hiding it in safe custody, lest he should be despoiled of that which is dear or dearer than life. Such should Christians be: spiritual misers: counting their treasure, which is "above fine gold," and "hiding it in their hearts,"* in safe keeping, where the great despoiler shall not be able to reach it. Oh Christians! how much more is your portion to you than the miser's treasure! Hide it: watch it: retain it. You need not be afraid of covetousness in spiritual things: rather "covet earnestly"† to increase your store, and by living upon it and living in it, it will grow richer in extent, and more precious and valuable.

But have I, through Divine grace, been enabled to withdraw my love from the unworthy objects which once possessed it, and to fix it on that which alone offers satisfaction? Let me attempt to give a reason to myself of the high estimation in which I hold it, as infinitely transcending those things which the world ventures their all—even their eternal happiness—to obtain. "Therefore, I love the commandments of God above gold, yea, above fine gold," because, while the world and my own heart have only combined to flatter me, *they* have discovered to me my real state as a self-deceived,‡ guilty,§ defiled|| sinner before God: because they have been as a "school-master to bring me to Christ,"¶ and, therefore, the blessed means of guiding me to the only remedy for sin, the only rest for my soul. I love them, because they have often supplied wholesome reproof when wandering, and plain direction when in perplexity. I love them, because they restrict me from that which would prove my certain ruin, and because in the way of obedience to them, the Lord has "accepted me with my sweet savour."** Should I not then love them? Can gold, yea, fine gold, offer to me blessings such as these? Can it heal my broken

* Verse 11.—Augustine tells us of himself, that, while a Manichee, he slighted the Scriptures for the plainness of its style, which appeared to him (from a false standard of criticism) not to be compared with the dignity of Ciceronian eloquence. (*Visi mihi est indigna scriptura quam Tullinæ dignitati compararem. Confess. Lib. iii. cap. 5.*) But after his blessed acquaintance with Christ, though Tully was still read with pleasure, yet this thing alone, said he, abated his former interest, that the name of Christ was not there. *Lib. iii. cap. 4.*

† 1 Cor. xii. 31. ‡ Rom. vii. 9. § James ii. 10. || Rom. vii. 14. ¶ Gal. iii. 24. ** Ezek. xx. 41. Comp. Isaiah lxiv. 6.

heart? Can it give relief to my wounded spirit? Has it any peace or prospect of comfort for me on my death-bed? And what cannot—what has not, what will not—the precious word of God do at that awful season of trial? O my God, I would be deeply ashamed, that I love thy commandments no better than I do—that they are so little influential upon my conduct—that they so often give place to objects of comparative nothingness in thy sight. O that my heart might be wholly and habitually exercised in thy precepts, that I may find the “work of righteousness to be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.”*

128. THEREFORE I ESTEEM ALL THY PRECEPTS CONCERNING ALL THINGS TO BE RIGHT; AND I HATE EVERY FALSE WAY.

THE difference between the Christian and the worldling—between him that is without care of eternity and him that makes it the “one thing needful”—is “known and read of all men.” The difference, however, between the Christian and the professor, though really as distinct in the sight of God, is far less perceptible to general observation. Consisting more in the state of heart, than in any external mark of separation, it is often only within the ken of that eye, whose sovereign prerogative it is to “search the heart,”† and to “weigh the spirits.”‡ Many are there who would profess to “esteem the precepts to be right,” as far as they inculcate the practice of those moral virtues, which they may be able in some faint exhibition to illustrate, and demand the abandonment of those sins, from the external influence of which they may have been delivered. But when they begin to observe the “exceeding breadth of the commandment”§—taking cognizance of the heart—enforcing the renunciation of the world, the crucifixion of sin, and the entire surrender of the heart unto God, the touchstone of profession becomes too close, and many who had too easily acquired a name in the church of God, are exposed to the light of open day with the brand of hypocrisy upon their foreheads. But the genuine child of God, attentive to every duty, and every circumstance of duty, “esteems all the Lord’s precepts concerning all things to be right.” He loves the evangelical as well as the moral precepts—those that teach him

* Isa. xxxiii. 17. † Jer. xvii. 10. ‡ Prov. xvi. 2. § Verse 96.

to renounce himself in every part—his sins as a source of pleasure, and his duties as a ground of dependence—and to believe in him as the only ground of hope, whom “the Father sent to be the Saviour of the world.”* He never complains of the strictness of the precepts, but he is continually brought low in the recollection of his own backwardness to obey. “Every way,” however pleasing to the flesh, that is opposed to the revealed will of God, is hated as “false” in itself, and “false” to his God. Wherever, indeed, there is “godly sincerity” in conviction, it will apply with equal resolution to sins of every kind and every degree. A plea offered for the indulgence of any one way of wickedness (as if it were unattended with any peculiar aggravations, or compensated by some surplus actings of duty, or allowed only for some temporary purpose) ruins all pretensions to uprightness of heart. If at any point the universality of gospel obedience or gospel modification is refused, the sincerity of the Christian character throughout the whole man is destroyed. If perfection is not desired, designed, and laboured after, the point of Christian sincerity is yet to be attained. If holiness is really loved, it will be loved for its own sake, and, therefore, the “perfecting of it in the fear of God,”† and dependence on his promises, will be the main object of pursuit. Wherever, then, Divine influence is felt, the effect will be visible in the judgment as well as in the affections. Not only shall we “love the commandments of God above fine gold,”‡ but our “love will abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment,”§ and the fruit will be evident in leading us to “esteem *all the precepts* to be right,” “approving things that are excellent, that we may be sincere and without offence unto the day of Christ.”||

O my soul, canst thou abide this close test of Christian integrity? Hast thou as much regard to the precepts, and duties, as to the privileges and comforts of the gospel? Is no precept evaded from repugnance to the cross that is entailed upon it? Is no secret lust retained? Art thou content to let all go? If I am sincere in my hatred of sin, I shall hate it more in my own house than abroad, I shall hate it most of all in my own heart. Here lies the grand seat of hypocrisy. And, therefore, if it “is deep,” let me search

* 1 John iii. 23. John vi. 29. † 2 Cor. vii. 1. ‡ Verse 127. § Phil. i. 9. || Phil. i. 10.

it. If it is dark, let me take the lamp of the Lord to penetrate into its interior hiding-places of evil. And, however fair its appearances, let me never be inclined to listen to it. Let me often put the question to my conscience—What does the omniscient “Observer of men”* know of my heart? Perhaps at the time that the church of God are esteeming my name, conscience, as the voice of God, may whisper to me—“That which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.”† Some evil way may yet be undetected within, that keeps me lifeless and unfruitful in the midst of the quickening means of grace. Let me look into my house—my calling—my family—my soul—and surely in the course of this search abundant matter will be found for prayer, contrition, renewed determination of heart, and dependence upon my God—“O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes? *I will keep thy statutes*—O forsake me not utterly.”‡ And oh! let my spirit be wounded by every fresh discovery of sin. Let my soul bleed under it. Let my conscience ever upbraid me. Let me search into myself. Let me run to my God. Let me call heaven and earth to my help. Let me sharpen my spiritual weapons for the conflict, until the secret iniquity is overcome and dispossessed, and its guilt and defilement removed for ever from my heart.

PART XVII.

129. THY TESTIMONIES ARE WONDERFUL; THEREFORE DOTH MY SOUL KEEP THEM.

THE unsearchable depths of the word of God will make the believer a learner as long as he lives. Even he, who “was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter,”§ was brought to the same adoring contemplation of the revelation of God—“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!”|| Every way, indeed, is this revelation worthy of him, the first title of whose name is “Wonderful.”¶ It lays open to the heaven-taught soul, what “eye

* Job vii. 20. Scott on the passage. † Luke xvi. 15. ‡ Verses 5, 8. § 2 Cor. xii. 4. || Rom. xi. 33. ¶ Isaiah ix. 6.

hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man.”* “How can man be just with God”†—how “the way into the holiest of all is made manifest”‡—how abounding grace is the death as well as the pardon of sin§—these are among the stupendous discoveries of the word of the sacred book, that constrain from the humble and reflecting mind the acknowledgment—“Thy testimonies are wonderful.” For what heart can search into the bottom of them? What mind can apprehend their extent? They are the things that God himself delighteth in, and that “the angels desire to look into”||—deposited and kept as the “heritage” of the Lord’s people “for ever.”¶ And, to show the infinite enlargement of this heritage, we need only remark, that he, who foreknew every thought that would find an entrance into their minds, has secretly laid up in these “testimonies,” a word of seasonable direction and encouragement for every, even the most minute, occasion and circumstances of need to the end of their days. And when we farther consider, that all the whole intercourse between God and man, throughout all ages of the church, treasured up in the vast unsearchable depository of the Divine mind and purpose, is here wrapped up in words, to which Infinite wisdom has given capacity to receive the revelation—can we forbear reiterating the exclamation—“Thy testimonies are wonderful?”

But should we be satisfied with “adoring the fulness of Scripture?”*** Should we not long to imbibe its spirit and to exhibit its power and holiness? The contemplation of its amazing breadth will not surely suffer a child of God to be satisfied with a barren investigation of its contents, without applying them as motives and principles of conduct. Admiration kindles desire; and within the innermost “soul,” as in a casket, are “kept” his love and purposes of obedience to the testimonies of his God. The stamp of

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* 1 Cor. ii. 9. † Job ix. 2; xxv. 4. ‡ Heb. ix. 8, with x. 19, 20. § Rom. v. 20, with vi. 1—6. || 1 Peter i. 12. ¶ Verse 111.

*** ‘Adoro plenitudinem Scripturarum,’—was the exclamation of Tertullian, ‘in which posture of holy admiration,’ said the deeply-learned and pious Dr. Owen, ‘I desire my mind may be found while I am in this world.’

‘What do I not owe to the Lord for permitting me to take a part in the translation of his word? Never did I see such wonders, and wisdom, and love, in the blessed book, as since I have been obliged to study every expression; and it is a delightful reflection, that death cannot deprive us of the pleasure of studying its mysteries.’—Martyn’s Life, p. 271.

Divine authority upon them, while it deepens his reverence, commands his steady and cheerful obedience. And yet how affecting is the thought that these wonders should be so frequently read, and gazed at with an unmeaning eye, with little or no discovery of their interesting import—that so many should persevere in a uniform perusal of this blessed work, as a dry task to satisfy their conscience, without ever being arrested with its wondrous contents! They pass by the door of the treasury, hardly condescending to look aside into it, or at best only taking a transient glance which brings nothing visible before their eyes of its inexhaustible stores. Thus the Lord testifies of them—"I have written to them the great thing of my law, but they are counted as a strange thing."* But far more wonderful is it, that we, who have been led to pray—"Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law"†—and who have in some measure received an answer to our prayer in the enlightening influence of "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation"‡—that we should often be so indifferent to the mysteries of redeeming love here unfolded before us, and that we should experience so little of their practical influence upon the daily course of our walk. Oh! let the recollection of our indolent frames and shortcomings in habitual devotedness to the Lord never cease to humble us. Let us not be content to enter into the testimonies of God as an ordinary study, but exercise ourselves in them as a means of grace—as an ordinance of his own appointment—and as a spring of unceasing love to the ways of obedience. There are doubtless many parts, of which we conceive ourselves to have a very competent understanding, but which, in a renewed perusal, with fresh prayer and meditation, will open a more extended view—a new field of wonders, far beyond our present contracted apprehension.§ And this recollection, while it serves to remind us of our ignorance, at the same time will supply

* Hosea viii. 12. † Verse 18. ‡ Eph. i. 17.

§ Augustine found this so experimentally true, that he tells us, 'that though he should with better capacity and greater diligence study all his life-time, from the beginning of his childhood to decrepit age, nothing else but the Holy Scriptures, yet they are so compacted and thickly set with truths, that he might daily learn something which before he knew not.' Aug. Epis.

To this truth the venerable Antistess Hess lately set his seal at the age of eighty-six, when he informed a young Missionary of the Society for promoting

fresh encouragement to supplicate for an enlarged influence of spiritual light and love, that, while our minds are opened to discover, our hearts may be disposed to "keep the testimonies of God."

130. THE ENTRANCE OF THY WORDS GIVETH LIGHT; IT GIVETH UNDERSTANDING UNTO THE SIMPLE.

So "wonderful are thy testimonies," gracious God, that even by touching, as it were, only the threshold of them, "the entrance of thy word giveth light and understanding unto" my heart. The instant that the study is commenced in simplicity and prayer, the word finds an imperceptible "entrance" with its first dawning "light" into the soul just sufficient to make darkness visible, but "shining more and more unto the perfect day."* Indeed, whatever of spiritual light is known in this dark world has issued from no other source than the word of God, forcing its "entrance," like the beams of the sun, upon the opening eyes of "a man that was born blind." The word of God, though "wonderful" in its high and heavenly mysteries, opens the path wherein "the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err." From any one page of this Divine book, a child or an idiot under the teaching of God may draw more instruction than the most acute philosopher could ever obtain from any other fountain of light, and may acquire a more intelligent perception of its contents than the student, untaught by the Spirit of God, who may have devoted to the study of it the industry and perseverance of many successive years. For very possible is it to be possessed of all the treasures of literature, and yet to remain in total darkness and ignorance of every thing that it is most important for a sinner to know.† Much light may be

Christianity among the Jews, that, 'for seventy years the word of God had been the daily object of his unremitting researches, and that still he discovers in it new traces of the mysterious love and wisdom of God.'—*Jewish Expositor*, November, 1825.

* Prov. iv. 18.

† 'A very extraordinary thing,' said one, 'if I, who have read the Bible over and over in the original languages, have studied it day and night, and have written criticisms and comments on it—a very extraordinary thing, that I should not be able to understand that meaning in the Scriptures, which is said to be so plain, that a "wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err" in the discovering of it.' And so it is extraordinary, till we open the Bible; and there we see the fact explained.

shining around us on every side without finding an "entrance" into the heart—"The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not."* The love of sin shuts out the light—"Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."† The pride also of human reasoning combines to bar the entrance against the admission of the heavenly light, so that in a vast multitude of cases, because "the eye is evil, the whole body is full of darkness;" and "if the light that is in them is darkness, how great is that darkness!"‡ Most awful is the view given us of the conflict between the contending powers of light and darkness—"The god of this world blinding the eyes of them that believe not"—the God of heaven resisting his hateful influence, and successfully effecting an "entrance" for the light of "his own word" into the hearts of his people.§ But too often do we forget the continued and habitual watchfulness that is required to repress the influence of those dispositions just alluded to, whose tendency is continually in operation to refuse admission to the light of God. And it may be not unnecessary to remind ourselves, how much more entrance would have been given to the word, and consequently how much greater would have been the diffusion of light in the soul, were we as earnest and diligent in secret prayer for Divine teaching, as we are accustomed to be in the public hearing of the word.

There is also another interesting illustration that may be given of this subject. Those who have been accustomed to familiar intercourse with the illiterate, cannot fail to have observed an enlargement and elevation of thought in their uncultivated and unintellectual minds, where the word has found an "entrance"—an earnest of the restoration of man to his original glory, when doubtless every intellectual power, as well as every spiritual faculty, was "filled with all the fulness of God."|| But the enthusiast is not satisfied with the light of the word. Led by the delusion of his

The man who approaches the word of God in his own wisdom shall not find what the "fool" will discover under the teaching of Divine wisdom. "For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent"—and "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise."—Cecil's Remains.

* John i. 5. Scott. 'Admitted it not.'—Campbell. † John iii. 19, 20.
‡ Matt. vi. 23. § Comp. 2 Cor. iv. 4—6. || Eph. iii. 19. Comp. Col. iii. 10.

own heart, he expects a light within—an immediate revelation of the Spirit—independent of the word. It cannot, however, be safe to separate the light of the Spirit from the light of the word. The word, indeed, moves in subservieney to the Spirit, but the light of the Spirit is no where promised as dissociated from the word. If it does not always guide directly by the word, yet its influence is only perceptible in the direction of the word. The word is in the matter if not in the mode; and, though the Spirit may by immediate light direct us to any path of duty, yet it is invariably to that path, which had been previously marked by the light of the word. Thus the Spirit and the word conjointly become the guide of our way—the Spirit enlightening and quickening the word—and the word never failing to evidence the light of the Spirit, nor will their combined influence ever leave the church of God, until she has joyfully and completely entered into Immanuel's land, where she shall need no other light than that of the glory of God, and of the Lamb, which shall shine in her for ever.*

But, reader, rest not satisfied with whatever measure of light may have been hitherto vouchsafed. Seek that the word may have “an entrance ministered unto you *abundantly*.” The most advanced believer is he, who is most ready to acknowledge how much of the word yet remains unexplored before him.† Cultivate the disposition of simplicity—the spirit of a “little child”‡—willing to receive, embrace, submit to whatever the revelation of God may produce before you. It is to this spirit that the promise of heavenly light is exclusively made—“The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise *the simple*. The meek will he guide in judgment, *the meek* will he teach his way.”§ Never will a proud unhumbléd mind know the benefit of the instruction of the Spirit of God. To students of this character, the Bible must ever be a dark book, as it is the very design of Scripture to destroy that disposition which they bring to the inquiry. Of little comparative value then is that knowledge, which is unable to direct our way to heaven—nay, which obstructs our entrance thither by closing the avenues of spiritual light to our souls. Far more glo-

* See Rev. xxi. 23.

† See the testimonies adduced in the notes on the preceding verse.

‡ Matt. xviii. 3. § Psalm xix. 7; xxv. 9.

rious is the simplicity of the word than the wisdom of the world.

“At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father—Lord of heaven and earth—because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.”*

131. I OPENED MY MOUTH, AND PANTED; FOR I LONGED
FOR THY COMMANDMENTS.

WHEN the “wonderful” character of God’s “testimonies” is apprehended, and when their “entrance has given light to the soul,” something far beyond ordinary affection and desire is excited. A thirsty man burning with inward heat on a sultry day, and “opening his mouth and panting” for some alleviation of his thirst, is the expressive image employed to describe the unutterable longings of the child of God for the attainment of the object of his desires. Or, if we suppose before us the man nearly exhausted by the heat of his race, and “opening his mouth and panting” to take in fresh breath to renew his course; not more naturally does “the sun rejoice as a strong man to run his race”† in the heaven, than the spiritual man to run his race to glory.‡ He cannot satisfy himself in his desires. The motions of his soul to his God are his life and his joy. It is a spring of perpetual motion beating within—perpetual because natural—a principle—having, indeed, its faintings and its sickness, but still returning to its original spring of life and vigour. It seems as if the soul could never draw in enough of the influences of the spiritual life. Its longings are insatiable. It is as if the heart would “break with”§ the overpowering strength of its own desires, until at length tired with the weariness of the conflict, the believer “opens his mouth and pants” to fetch in a fresh supply of invigorating grace. Thirsty for a little reviving,|| he finds it in the enjoyment of the commandments of his Lord—enjoying the Lord himself in the way of his commandments as the well-spring of refreshment to his soul.¶ Hear the man of God giving, or rather attempting to give, expression to his “pantings” in other Psalms—“As the hart panteth after

* Matt. xi. 25. † Psalm xix. 5.

‡ For another illustration of this image. see Job xxix. 23.

§ Verse 20. || Ezra ix. 8. ¶ See on verse 20.

the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for thee: my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is. I stretch forth my hands unto thee; my soul thirsteth after thee as a thirsty land.”* Thus was it, that Job “opened his mouth and panted,”—“O that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even unto his seat!”† And the church, when she was able to pour out her heart before the Lord—“With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early.”‡ St. Paul also gives us his own experience as descriptive of the same intenseness of desire—“Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”§

Nor, indeed, ought we to be satisfied, unless our affections are thus engaged and in full exercise in the different workings of the life of God in the heart and conduct.¶ The soul must be kept open to Divine influence, so that, when we feel the Lord touching us with conviction, inclining our hearts to himself, and constraining us to his service, we may be ready to “exercise ourselves unto godliness,”¶ in receiving, cherishing, and improving the heavenly principle, by which we have been excited to “long after his commandments,” and may “open our mouths and pant” for more advanced progress in them. It is not so much the quantity, as the activity of faith that we regard—always at work—stirring up a holy fire within for the utmost stretch of human attainments—like men of large projects and high determination, still aspiring to more of God—both in the enjoyment of his love, and in conformity to his will. And shall we be ashamed of these feelings? Shall we not rather

* Psalm xlii. 1; lxiii. 1; cxliii. 6. † Job xxiii. 3. ‡ Isa. xxvi. 9. § Phil. iii. 12—14.

¶ ‘Be always displeased with what thou art, if thou desirest to attain to what thou art not, for where thou hast pleased thyself, there thou abidest. But if thou sayest, I have enough, thou perishest. Always add—always walk—always proceed. Neither stand still, nor go back, nor deviate.’—Augustine.

¶ 1 Tim. iv. 7.

be deeply humbled, that we know so little of them—encouraged, if we have any springings of them—alarmed, if we be utterly destitute of their influence? Shall we not be “opening our mouth and panting,” when any new path of service is opened before us? For if we are content to be strangers to this “longing after God”—this readiness for duty, what else is there, that can keep us from “sliding back from the Lord by a perpetual backsliding?”* Growing in sin, declining in love, and gradually relinquishing the habit of prayer, we shall shortly find little attaching to us in the gospel but the empty name—Christianity without Christ. The world will despise Christian exercises as enthusiasm, the distemper of a misguided imagination. But is it—can it be—otherwise than a “reasonable service,”† as well as a bounden obligation, to give up our whole desires to him, who alone is worthy of them? There can be little evidence of their sincerity, unless they are supreme.

Perhaps, however, there may be seasons of conscious deadness and unfaithfulness, when I may be ready to shrink from the elevated standard of this verse. But if my heart is drawing back, let me force it on. Let me lay my command, or rather God’s command, upon it. Let conscience do its office, until my heart is brought into actual and close contact with this touchstone of my spiritual prosperity. Let me then ask myself—What is the pulse of my desires after spiritual things? What exercises of grace do I find in them? What improvement of grace do I derive from them? Do I pant, thirst, long after the enjoyment of heavenly pleasure? Do I mourn over the conflict with that sluggishness and indifference of spirit, which so often hinder my race? Am I found frequently at the throne of grace, bewailing the dulness of my frame, and seeking for greater enlargement of desires and a more intense appetite? Surely such desires will issue in the confidence of faith;—“My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness.”‡

132. LOOK THOU UPON ME, AND BE MERCIFUL UNTO ME, AS THOU USEST TO DO UNTO THOSE THAT LOVE THY NAME.

SUITABLE as this prayer is for every sinner and for every moment, yet it seems especially framed for the believer’s dark and clouded moments. Mercy is, indeed, secured to

* Jer. viii. 5.

† Rom. xii. 1.

‡ Psalm lxxiii. 5.

him beyond the powers of earth and hell to despoil him of it, but the comfortable sense of this mercy is vouchsafed only according to the strength of his desires, and the earnestness and simplicity of his faith. And this is indeed a blessing, with which no earthly source of satisfaction will be "worthy to be compared." What are all the riches of the world without it, but splendid poverty—as little able to supply the place of Jesus in the soul, as the magnificent array of the starry firmament to compensate for the absence of the sun? It is night with the child of God—Egyptian night—"darkness which may be felt,"*—until his Sun appear to chase away his griefs and gloom—until his Lord manifests himself in answer to his cry—"Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me." To have the portion of "those that love the name" of God is then the grand object of desire. To have our offering, as Abel's was,† accepted with God—to walk as Enoch walked,‡ with God—to commune with him as Abraham,§ and Moses,|| were privileged to do—to be conformed with the holy Apostle¶ to the death of Christ—in a word, to be interested in all the purchase of a Saviour's blood—"this is the heritage of the Lord's servants,"—this is the "one thing that we have desired of the Lord, and are seeking after"***—"this,"—we can testify with the dying Psalmist—"is all our salvation and all our desire."†† "Remember me then, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people; O visit me with thy salvation; that I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance."‡‡

And yet, alas! there are too many seasons in our spiritual experience, when the power and deceitfulness of sin have cast us into so lifeless a frame, that we are not only living without the enjoyment of this portion, but at rest without it, scarcely knowing or caring whether the Lord look on us or not. At such seasons, when our gracious long-suffering God, having "hid himself,"§§ and "gone and returned to his place,"||| is once more pleased to manifest himself to us, it is usually in the way of sharp conviction, making us to feel our distance, our coldness, our barrenness; awaking us to search into the cause, and—in contrasting our sad condition

* Exodus x. 21. † Gen. iv. 4. ‡ Ibid. v. 24. § Ibid. xviii. 17—33. || Exodus xxxiii. 11; Deut. xxxiv. 10. ¶ Phil. iii. 10; Gal. ii. 20. ** Ps. xxvii. 4. †† 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. ‡‡ Psalm cvi. 4, 5. § § Isaiah lvii. 17. ||| Hosea v. 15.

with those who are walking in the favour of their God,—bringing forth the cry from the heart—“Look thou upon *me*, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name.” An answer to such a prayer as this, offered in the humility, earnestness, and perseverance of faith, though it may be awhile delayed, will surely never be forgotten.* If, therefore, we cannot yet “sing in the ways of the Lord,”† yet let us not cease to mourn after him, till he look upon us, and “satisfy us with his mercy.”‡ And oh! let us remember, that there is but one way, through which one gracious look or one expression of tender mercy can ever visit our souls. Let our eyes and heart then be ever fixed on Jesus. For if we are accepted so that the Lord can “look upon us,” and “not behold iniquity in us,” it is only in this his beloved Son. “We are complete in him.”§ But has this prayer ever received an answer with any of us, either in “the goings of our God in the sanctuary,”|| or in the more secret manifestation¶ of his love? Now, then, Christians, “arise and shine.”** Let it be known that you have been on the mount with God, by the lustre of your face, the adorning of your profession, before the world.

Lord! since our looks to thee are often so slight, so cold, so distant, that no impression is made upon our hearts, do thou condescend continually to look upon us with mercy and with power. Vouchsafe us such a look as may bring us to ourselves, and touch us with tenderness and contrition in the remembrance of that sin, unbelief, and disobedience, which pierced the hands, the feet, the heart of our dearest Lord and Saviour.††

133. ORDER MY STEPS IN THY WORD; AND LET NOT ANY INIQUITY
HAVE DOMINION OVER ME.

To expect the favour of the Lord without an habitual desire of conformity to his image, is one among the many delusions of a self-deceiving heart. It is the peculiar character of the Christian, that he is as earnest in his desires for deliverance from the power as from the guilt of sin; and even could we conceive the Lord “to look upon him” with

* Compare Isaiah xxx. 18. Hab. ii. 3. † Psalm cxxxviii. 5. ‡ Psalm xc. 14. § Compare Num. xxiii. 21. Eph. i. 6. Col. ii. 10. || Psalm lxxviii. 24. ¶ Matt. vi. 6. ** Isaiah lx. 1. †† Compare Luke xxii. 61.

a sense of his favour, he would still feel himself a wretched and miserable creature, until he had received an answer to his prayer—"Let not any iniquity have dominion over me." But it is sometimes a question of no small difficulty, precisely to ascertain when "iniquity" may be said to "have dominion over us." We apprehend the actual consent of the will to distinguish the real dominion of sin in the heart. Light, and knowledge, and conscience, may open the path of holiness, but while the will—the sovereign power in the soul—dissents, the reigning power of sin continues undisputed. Much care, however, much singleness, and a most jealous scrutiny of the springs of action, are required accurately to determine the bias of the will, and, consequently, the dominion of iniquity. The perplexed, conflicting soul may mistake the rebellion of iniquity for its dominion—its continued impression upon the heart for its ruling sway.

On the other hand, the power of conviction offering an unavoidable, but constrained opposition, to its influence, may present some hopeful appearance of deliverance, while the dominant principle is still unshaken. The present resolution to any particular act of sin may be weakened, while the love and habit of it remain unaffected. It is not always, when sin is condemned, or even forsaken, that it is hated; nor are duties always loved in the act of their performance. What is considered by the awakened superficial professor as the evidence of uprightness of heart in his opposition to the power of sin, is often nothing more than the unavailing resistance of a natural enlightened conscience to the ruling principle of the heart. Much may be done by the light and power of conscience, in condemning every known sin, and in restraining from many; in illustrating every known duty, and insisting upon the external performance of many, while yet the full dominion of iniquity is undisturbed. Were not Ahab and Judas as completely under the dominion of iniquity after their repentance as they were before? Did not Balaam, with all his knowledge—and the young ruler with all his loveliness of natural character and promising semblance of sincerity—"lack that one thing"*—a heart delivered from the dominion of its own iniquity? At the same time, however, occasional surprisals, resisted workings, abhorred lusts, immediate injections of evil and blasphemous thoughts, are no proofs of the "dominion of ini-

* Mark x, 21.

quity.” It is only when ascendancy is acquired in the affections, that its reigning power is acknowledged. The throne can admit but of one ruler, and, therefore, though grace and iniquity may and do co-exist within, they cannot be co-partners in one sovereignty. Thus the dominion of iniquity may be known for the conviction of slight, self-deluding professors, and for the encouragement of the Lord’s tried people.

And how inestimably precious is the thought, that deliverance from this cursed dominion is inseparably connected with a state of acceptance with God! The man who is living in the enjoyment of the unspeakable blessing of pardoned iniquity, is he “in whose spirit there is no guile.”* He desires to have a work done within him, as well as for him. He longs to know his Saviour as a *whole* Christ—“made of God unto him Sanctification and” complete “Redemption,” as well as “Righteousness.”† He comes to the cleansing fountain as the double cure of his iniquity—equally effectual to wash from its power as from its guilt.

In connexion with this work of sanctification, and as an important means of promoting it, an habitual respect to the word of God is of universal application. David had sufficiently proved in his own experience, the efficacy of the word for this purpose, having accustomed himself to “hide it in his heart, that he might not sin against”‡ his God. And from his own conviction of its happy influence, he had commended it to the especial attention of the young, as a prescribed and effectual means, “wherewith they might cleanse their way.”§ The recollection, however, of his continual forgetfulness of this rule, and his conscious inability to observe it, leads him to turn it into a matter of prayer—“Order my steps in thy word.” And, indeed, if we are living very close to God, (much closer than the generality of Christians are content to live,) we shall be most fearful of walking alone. Every step we shall require to have ordered for us by our heavenly Father’s word, because at every step devious paths present themselves on either side, beset with imperceptible danger, and spread with a fowler’s snare. And what a blessed and comfortable path would this be for us, if we had singleness and simplicity always to “look right on and straight before us!”|| But alas! we are often

* Ps. xxxii. 1, 2. † 1 Cor. i. 30. ‡ Verse 11. § Verse 9. || Prov. iv. 25.

only half roused from our security. The word is forgotten, or there is an unreadiness to receive a Divine impression from it. Our own wisdom is consulted, and “or ever we are aware,” “iniquity” regains a temporary “dominion over us.”

Now I would ask myself—What do I know of such a walk as this? Am I frequently during the day looking upward to my gracious Guide, and then looking into his word as my direction in the way, and lastly, considering my heart and conduct, whether it is “ordered in the word?” Let me remember, that it is only the man who has “the law of God in his heart,” that possesses the security, that “none of his steps shall slide.”* How important, therefore, is the inquiry, when I take a step into the world—Is it “ordered in God’s word?” I would desire also to have especial regard to that part of God’s word for the ordering of my steps, which exhibits Christ as my perfect example, that, walking after him, and following in his steps, I may be able to frame my temper and habits according to this unsullied pattern. Nor would I forget, that what is here the matter of earnest prayer is marked as the peculiar promise of the gospel—“Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace.”† And surely to the soul struggling with the dominion of iniquity, no prospect can be so sweet as the fulfilment of this precious word. We are ready to meet the incursions of sin in the strength of our own resolutions, which, though not in their place to be neglected, yet, when unassisted and alone, can only be compared to “the morning cloud, and the early dew that passeth away.”‡ But to have immediate recourse to God with the incessant petition—“Order my steps in thy word,”—and to expect an answer to this prayer in the light and influence of the Spirit to mortify our corruption, and to direct our path to the Saviour’s cross, seems to be the appointed means of present relief, and the only hopes of overcoming in the end. We doubt not but the supplies of strength and encouragement will be vouchsafed sufficient to restrain the “dominion of iniquity,” and even to “keep under” its daily risings, except as they may be needful for the exercise of our graces, and be eventually overruled for the glory and praise of their faithful God.

* Psalm xxxvii. 31.

† Rom. vi. 14.

‡ Hos. vi. 4.

134. DELIVER ME FROM THE OPPRESSION OF MAN; SO WILL I
KEEP THY PRECEPTS.

Not that the believer would (at least irrespective of submission to the will of God)* desire his deliverance from trouble on account of personal pain and distress; but that he is sometimes brought into circumstances of peculiar trial, which he finds an unavoidable hinderance in the service of his God. And this conviction urges his importunate supplication before his God, where he never makes interest in vain. "He cries unto the Lord because of the oppressors, and he sends a Saviour, and a great one, and he delivers him."† The grace of God is indeed omnipotent—"Mountains become plains before"‡ it; or the "worm" in the strength of his grace is enabled to "thresh them, and beat them small, and make them as chaff."§ Nor are instances wanting, where the Christian is strengthened to overcome the most formidable opposition, and to "profess a good profession before many witnesses,"|| who are "watching" and wishing "for his halting."¶ But yet, where faith has been in continued exercise, and obstacles to conscientious obedience remain unmoved, it will form a subject of acceptable petition, that the gracious providence of God would open some plainer and more encouraging path for the observance of his precepts—"Deliver me from the oppression of man; so will I keep thy precepts." A child of God, bound in the fetters of a worldly family, and restrained by an authority, to which deference is justly due, from a free and unreserved obedience to the Lord, might send up this prayer with assured acceptance.

A time of "deliverance from the oppression of man," as well as a time of persecution from his enmity, has sometimes proved a season of extraordinary prosperity in the church of God. It was, when "the Churches *had rest* throughout all Judea, and Galilee and Samaria," that they "*were edified*; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, they *were multiplied*."*** And thus by individual experience, whatever may be conceived or felt of the benefit of persecution, yet the weariness of a long

* See the example of David, 2 Sam. xv. 25, 26; and of David's Lord, Luke xxii. 42.

† Isaiah xix. 20. ‡ Zech. iv. 7. § Isa. xli. 14, 15. || 1 Tim. iv. 12. ¶ Jer. xx. 10. *** Acts ix. 31.

protracted conflict is often more than flesh and blood can bear, and which he who "knoweth our frame,"* will not refuse to look upon, and remove in answer to the prayers of his afflicted people. At the same time, knowing our proneness to self-indulgence and our natural inclination to shrink from the appointed cross, this prayer requires to be presented with exceeding caution and self-jealousy, lest, in our eagerness to escape from the difficulties of our path, we should lose the important benefit intended by them. The petition, therefore, for deliverance must ever be accompanied with a sincere and upright purpose to "keep God's precepts." How many have exposed their ignorance of their own hearts, when the supplication has been heard and the deliverance granted, and the promise of obedience been forgotten!

Fellow-Christian! have your circumstances of trial ever dictated such a prayer? How, then, when the answer has been vouchsafed, and your feet are set at liberty, have you improved your freedom? Has the effect of it been visible in an increasing devotedness of heart to the service of your God? Has the "way of escape" opened to you been remembered as a spring of gratitude, and an encouragement to exercise yourself in a more spiritual walk with God? After all, however, we have lost the blessing of the cross, if we have not learnt to bless the Lord for it. No good will ever come out of it, if it does not issue in a song of praise, if we have not been able to take it in our arms, and receive it as a token of fatherly love. At all times, also, the safest and shortest way to peace is to be made willing that God should use his own methods with us, to be engaged in every situation in doing all we can for him, and leaving ourselves, our difficulties, our discouragements in his hands, who makes no mistakes in any of his dispensations with his people—but who orders all things, so that they may "turn to their salvation through their prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ."†

135. MAKE THY FACE TO SHINE UPON THY SERVANT; AND TEACH ME THY STATUTES.

LET the Lord "deliver us from the oppression of man," and "make even our enemies to be at peace with us,"‡ still, if we are not in a thriving state of spiritual health, we shall

* Psalm ciii. 14.

† Phil. i. 19.

‡ Prov. xvi. 7.

be restless and uneasy, until he “make his face to shine upon us.” And in the Scripture revelation of the character of God—“dwelling between the cherubims,”* and, therefore, on the mercy-seat†—with the “rainbow,” the emblem of “the covenant of peace,” “round about the throne,”‡ as if to invite the access of sinners, from every quarter—have we not full warrant to expect the desired blessing? Are we not more imboldened to plead—“*Thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth*; stir up thy strength, and come and save us? Turn us again, O God, and *cause thy face to shine*, and we shall be saved?”§ Others we see eagerly looking for some scattered crumbs of goodness in the world. Let them seek what they please, and find what they can—it will be discovered at last, that they have “spent their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not.”|| The believer’s incessant cry is—Let me see “the King’s face.”

But it is both important and interesting to mark the repetitions in this beautiful Psalm. David had just before prayed—“Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me.”¶ Here again he offers up, with some slight variation, the same prayer—“Make thy face to shine upon thy servant.” Such cries in the mouth of this holy servant of God, must have been most hopeless petitions—nay, the expression of the most daring presumption, had there not been such an acquaintance with the gospel way of access to God, as led him joyfully to renounce every other way, and diligently to improve the light afforded him in making this acceptable approach to his God. And, indeed, whatever obscurity may be supposed to hang over the question relating to the faith of the Old Testament believers, the confidence which they were accustomed to express in their exercises at the throne of grace can surely be explained upon no other view, than that which allows them to have attained a far more distinct perception of gospel privilege, through the shadowy representations of their law than is commonly imagined. Else how could they have been so wrestling and persevering in their petitions—so successful in overcoming the spirit of bondage, and in breathing out the spirit of adoption in the expression of their wants and desires before the Lord? The prayers

* 2 Kings xix. 15. Psalm xcix. 1. Ezek. x. 1—5. † Ex. xxv. 17—22, with Rom. iii. 25. ‡ Rev. iv. 3. § Ps. lxxx. 1—3. || Isa. lv. 2. ¶ Ver. 132.

of the Old Testament church are not more distinguished for their simplicity, spirituality, and earnestness, than for their unfettered, evangelical confidence. When they approach the footstool of the Divine Majesty with the supplications—"Make thy face to shine upon thy servant"—"Thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth"—it was as if they had pleaded—"Reconciled Father, thou that sittest upon a throne of grace, look upon us—Abba, Father, be gracious to us."

There are many, however, who seem to despise this evangelical confidence, going on in heartless complaining and uncertain apprehensions of their state, as if doubting was their life, and resting upon the presumption, that the "shining of God's face upon them" is not indispensable to their salvation. But will they, then, be content to "be saved, yet so as by fire,"* instead of having "an entrance ministered unto them *abundantly* into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour?" Is it enough for them to be *just alive*, when "the things that remain," from want of being duly cherished, "are ready to die?" If they can be safe without the conscious interest in the favour of God, can they be so without the desire for it? Is not this assurance attainable? Is it not commanded?† Is it not most desirable? God's people are living habitually either in a state of spiritual enjoyment or of restless dissatisfaction. Their clouded seasons are times of wrestling supplication—seasons of deep humiliation, tenderness of spirit, and constant waiting upon God, until he "makes his face to shine upon his servants." And thus they exhibit the secret actings of the principle of assurance, even when there is no sensible enjoyment of this most important blessing.

But how, it may be asked, is this happy state of sunshine to be realized? Its chief hinderances (apart from the indulgence of sin or a course of secret backsliding from God) are found in mistaken or contracted views of the gospel. The chief means of attainment, therefore, will be included in enlarged apprehensions of the evangelical scheme—of its fulness, satisfying every claim, and supplying every want—of its freeness, unencumbered with conditions, and holding forth encouragement to the most unworthy—and of its

* Compare 1 Cor. iii. 15. 2 Pet. i. 11. † See 2 Cor. xiii. 5. Heb. vi. 11. 2 Pet. i. 10.

security, affording permanent rest in the foundations of the covenant of grace. Thus will the life of faith be maintained in constant exercise—each successive day will be marked by some fresh contemplation of Jesus, and renewed reliance upon him—and coming closer and closer to him, our hope will be enlivened with the constant sense of reconciliation and love.

We can readily account for the persevering determination, with which the “shining of the Lord’s face” is sought throughout this Psalm, in the recollection, that the blessing is attended not only to the believer himself with a peace and joy that cannot be expressed, but also that it is productive of the most important benefits to those with whom he is connected. For who is he, that is most likely to win others to the love of the Saviour, and to the service of God? Who is most likely to enliven the drooping soul, or to recover the backslider? Is it not he, who lives most in the sunshine of gospel light, and who, therefore, has most to tell of the sweetness of gospel experience? Do you then ask—How shall I attain to this heavenly enjoyment? My heart, alas! is so cold and barren, my affections so languid, my desires so faint, my sky so often clouded—I do not forget that I am a child—but a child in disgrace is too often my character and my restless condition. Then exercise your faith in going where David was wont to go—As a penitent child, “arise, and go to your Father”—acknowledge your transgression—tell your complaint before him—resort much and often to him; be importunate; be patient; plead the name* and merits of Jesus, and you will not, you cannot, plead in vain, you will once more regain the comfort of your assurance, and walk happily, holily, as well as confidently in the light of your Father’s countenance. Yet the farther you advance in the enjoyment of the blessed ways of God, the more you will learn of your own ignorance, and of the darkness of all mere human teaching; and, therefore, one main subject of your prayers will continue to the end to be—“Teach me thy statutes”—and he, that taught you this petition, will himself be your teacher in the way; for he is the promised teacher of the Lord’s people in the path of holiness; “I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.”†

* John xiv. 13, 14.

† Ezek. xxxvi. 27.

136. RIVERS OF WATERS RUN DOWN MINE EYES, BECAUSE THEY
KEEP NOT THY LAW.

THE most cursory view of the life of Jesus exhibits him as one, 'whose heart was made of tenderness.' Yet there were some occasions, when the display of his compassion was peculiarly striking. At the closing period of his life, it is recorded, that "when he was come near, and beheld the city"—"beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth"*—but now given up to its own ways, and "wrath coming upon it to the uttermost," he could not refrain his tears—"he wept over it."† It was then a moment of triumph. The air was rent with hosannahs. The road was strewed with branches from the trees, and all was joy and praise.‡ Amid all this exultation, the Saviour alone seemed to have no voice for the triumph—no heart for joy. "Rivers of waters ran down his eyes, because they kept not his law." Now a Christian in this, as in every other feature of character, will be conformed to the image of his Lord. His heart will, therefore, be touched with a tender concern for the honour of his God, and a pitying concern for those wretched sinners that "keep not his law," and are perishing in their own transgressions. Thus was it from the beginning—that "just Lot" in Sodom was "vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked."§ Thus was it with Moses, when, as he tells his faithless people, he "fell down before the Lord, as at the first, forty days and forty nights, he did neither eat bread nor drink water, because of all their sins which they had sinned, in doing wickedly in the sight of the Lord to provoke him to anger."|| Thus, also, Samuel, in the anticipation of the Lord's judgments upon Saul, "grieved himself, and cried unto the Lord all night."¶ Ezra on a similar occasion, in the deepest prostration of sorrow, "rent his garment and his mantle, and plucked off the hair of his head and of his beard, and sat down astonished until the evening sacrifice."** Jeremiah in the same spirit gives vent to his passionate vehemence of concern—"Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night, for the slain of the daughter of my people!"†† Paul, also, had the witness of his conscience of

* Psalm xlviii. 2. † Luke xix. 41. Compare Matt. xxiii. 37. ‡ Compare Luke xix. 36—40. § 2 Peter ii. 7, 8. || Deut. ix. 18, 19. ¶ 1 Sam. xv. 11.
** Ezra ix. 3, 4. †† Jer. ix. 1. Compare xiii. 17; xiv. 17.

“great heaviness and continued sorrow in his heart for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh.”* In reproving transgressors he could write to them in no other way than “out of much affliction and anguish of heart, with many tears;”† and in speaking of them to others, it was with the same tenderness of spirit—“Of whom I tell you, even weeping.”‡ And, if David at this time was suffering from the oppression of men, yet his own injuries never drew from him such expressions of overwhelming sorrow, as now that he was recollecting the violation of the law of his God by those around him.

Thus uniformly is the character of God’s people represented, as “those that sigh and cry for all the abominations that are done in the midst of the land.”§ And who does not see, what an enlarged sphere still presents itself on every side for the unrestrained exercise of Christian compassion? The awful spectacle of a world apostatized from God, of multitudes sporting with everlasting destruction, as if the God of heaven were “a man that he should lie,”|| is surely enough to force “rivers of waters” from the hearts of those who are concerned for his honour. What a mass of sin ascends as a cloud before the Lord, from a single heart! Add the aggregate of a village—a town—a country—a world! every day—every hour—every moment—Well might the “rivers of waters” rise to an overflowing tide, ready to burst its barriers. Could we witness a house on fire, without speedy and practical evidence of compassion for the inhabitants? And yet, alas! how often do we witness souls on the brink of destruction—unconscious of danger, or bidding defiance to it,—with comparative indifference! How are we Christians, if we believe not the Scripture warnings of their danger, or if, believing them, we do not bestir ourselves to their help? What hypocrisy is it to pray for their conversion, while we are making no effort to promote it! Surely it should be the subject of daily supplication, that this indifference concerning their everlasting state might give place to a spirit of weeping tenderness, and compassion; and that we might never see the Sabbaths of God profaned, his laws trampled under foot, the ungodly world “breaking their bands asunder, and casting away their cords from them,”¶ without a more de-

* Rom. ix. 1—3. † 2 Cor. ii. 4. ‡ Phil. iii. 18. Compare Acts xx. 19.
§ Ezekiel ix. 4. || Numb. xxiii. 19. ¶ Psalm ii. 3.

terminated resolution ourselves to keep these laws of our God, and to plead for their honour with these obstinate transgressors. Have we no near and dear relatives—yet “lying in wickedness—dead in trespasses and sins?” To what blessed family, reader, do you belong, where there are no such objects of pity? But be it so—It is well. Yet are you silent? Have you no ungodly, ignorant neighbours around you? And are they unwarned as well as unconverted? Do we visit them, connect ourselves in the way of courtesy or kindness, yet give them no word of affectionate entreaty on the concerns of eternity? Let our families, indeed, possess, as they ought to possess, the first claim to our compassionate regard. Then let our parishes, our neighbourhood, our country, the world, find a place in our affectionate, prayerful, and earnest consideration.

Nor let it be supposed, that the doctrine of sovereign and effectual grace has any tendency to paralyze exertion. So far from it, that the most powerful supports to Christian perseverance are derived from this source. The palpable and awful proofs meeting him on every side—of the “enmity of the carnal mind against God”—of its rooted indisposition either to submit to his law or to embrace his gospel—threaten to sink the Christian labourer in despondency. And nothing sustains him in his exercised course, but the assurance of the power of God to remove the resisting medium, and of his purpose to accomplish the subjugation of natural corruption in a countless multitude of his redeemed people.

It is, indeed, this spirit of compassionate interest, that forms the life, the pulse, and the strength of missionary exertion, and that has ever distinguished those honoured servants of God, who have devoted their time, their health, their talents, their all, to the blessed work of “saving souls from death, and covering a multitude of sins.”* Can we conceive of a missionary surrounded with thousands of mad idolaters, hearing their shouts, and witnessing their abominations, without “rivers of waters running down his eyes?”† Indignant grief for the dishonour done to God—

* James v. 20.

† ‘My God! I feel the mournful scene;
My bowels yearn o’er dying men!
And fain my pity would reclaim,
And snatch the fire-brands from the flame.

amazement at this affecting spectacle of human blindness—detestation of human impiety—compassionate yearnings over human wretchedness and ruin—all combine to force tears of the deepest sorrow from a heart enlightened and constrained by the influence of a Saviour's love—We have seen that this was our Master's spirit. And can I feel myself to be a Christian, if I am destitute of "this mind, that was in Christ Jesus?"* if I know nothing of his melting compassion for a lost world, or of his burning zeal for his heavenly Father's glory?

PART XVIII.

137. RIGHTEOUS ART THOU, O LORD, AND UPRIGHT ARE THY JUDGMENTS.—138. THY TESTIMONIES, THAT THOU HAST COMMANDED, ARE RIGHTEOUS, AND VERY FAITHFUL.

As the believer advances in the knowledge of the Gospel, he is led to adoring contemplation of the awful perfections of his God; he is able to justify his "ways," even when they "are in the sea and in the great waters,"† and to acknowledge the righteousness of his character, his government, and his testimonies. He is now made to see, that, though "clouds and darkness are round about him," yet "righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne."‡ This is the uniform acknowledgment of the Lord's people, even while they "see" but "as through a glass darkly," and "know" but "in part." "The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works."§ And the same acknowledgment will be made with perfect love and infinite humility, when in a world of unclouded day, they shall see "face to face," and "know even as also they are known"||—"And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb—Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty! *just and*

But feeble my compassion proves,
And can but weep where most it loves.
Thine own all-saving arm employ,
And turn these drops of grief to joy.'

* See Phil. ii. 4—8. † Psalm lxxvii. 19. ‡ Ibid. xcvii. 2. § Ibid. cxiv. 17. || 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

true are thy ways, thou king of saints.”* The unvarying testimony of the Lord’s people to the righteous character of his afflictive dispensations had before been imbodyed in the confession—“I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.”† We may here farther remark, that testimonies to this unsullied and exalted character of God have been extorted even from his enemies. Haughty Pharaoh was constrained to bow—“The Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked.”‡ Adonibezek, under “the blow of his hand”—cried out—“As I have done, so God hath requited me.”§

The young Christian is, however, less able to connect these attributes of God, with daily experience, and for the most part is fixed in the contemplation of the more engaging perfections of his love, his goodness, or his long-suffering. It may be, therefore, often considered a satisfactory evidence of growth in grace, when we are enabled in the habitual eyeing of our God to place before our minds the more deep and awful displays of his character, and to gather from thence an increase of light and peace, humility and consolation. Yet after all, it is the cross of Calvary, that exhibits to our view displays of the Divine attributes—at once the most appalling and the most encouraging.—Though his own declaration—that “he will by no means clear the guilty”||—seemed to present an insurmountable barrier to the purpose of mercy, yet, rather than the glory of a God of love should be obscured, or his righteous law should be mitigated, “he spared not his own Son¶—he made him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us.”**

And do not his testimonies exhibit the same display of righteousness and truth? When they require perfect love to God and man,†† do they require more than our “reasonable service”—more than it is our duty and privilege to render to him? None that understand their nature or have any spiritual apprehension of their tendency, will hesitate in setting their seal to the inscription, “The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.” “The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.”‡‡

But while we habituate our minds to contemplations of

* Rev. xv. 4. † Verse 75. ‡ Exodus ix. 27. § Judges i. 7. || Exodus xxxiv. 7. ¶ Rom. viii. 32. ** 2 Cor. v. 21. †† Matt. xxii. 37—39. ‡‡ Ps. xix. 9. Rom. vii. 12.

the character and government of God, let us take care, that they be not unproductive of practical influence. There is much murmuring within, that needs to be stilled—much repining to be hushed—much impatience to be repressed—many hard thoughts to be lamented, resisted, and banished. Now, all this proceeds from an imperfect perception of the revelation of God, and a want of submission to his righteous administration. We have forgotten also at these clouded seasons the many evidences that our own experience might afford of the gracious faithfulness of the Lord—all intended to illustrate this point—“to show that the Lord is upright; he is our rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.”* “In returning,” then, “and rest shall we be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be our strength.”† In the submissive acknowledgment of the Lord’s dispensations “our peace” will flow “as a river,”‡ more deep and extensive as it approaches the ocean, and fertilizing our souls with an abundant harvest of spiritual peace and enjoyment.

139. MY ZEAL HATH CONSUMED ME; BECAUSE MINE ~~DEES~~ HAVE FORGOTTEN THY WORDS.

ZEAL is a quality or passion of the human mind, whose real character must be determined by the objects on which it is employed, and the principle by which it is directed. There is a true and a false zeal—differing as widely from each other, as a heavenly flame from the infernal fire. The one is fervent, disinterested affection, expanding the heart, and delighting to unite with the whole empire of God in the pursuit of a good, which all may enjoy without envious rivalry. The other is a selfish interested principle, contracting the heart, and ready to sacrifice the good of mankind, and even the glory of God, to its own individual advantage. Were the power of this principle proportioned to its native tendency—or were it to operate extensively in an associated body, it would end in detaching its several members each from their proper centre, in disuniting them from each other, and, as far as its influence could reach, crumbling the moral system into discordant atoms. How much, alas! of this baneful principle passes

* Psalm xcii. 15.

† Isaiah xxx. 15.

‡ Ibid. xlviii. 18.

for zeal in the church, exemplified chiefly in an obstinate opposition to “the truth as it is in Jesus”—arming itself with the weapons of open persecution, or exercising itself in the milder warfare of reproach and calumny! “This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.”* How much also of that misguided heat, that spends itself upon the externals of religion, or would “call fire down from heaven”† in defence of fundamental truths, may be found among us, exposing its blind devotees to our Master’s tender rebuke—“Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of!”

Often also do we see a distempered counterfeit zeal disproportioned in its exercise—wasting its strength upon the subordinate parts of the system, and comparatively feeble in its maintenance of the vital doctrines of Christ—thus disuniting the church by adherence to points of difference, rather than compacting the church together by strengthening the more important points of agreement. Often again, by the same process in practical religion are the “mint, anise, and cummin” vehemently contended for, while “the weightier matters of the law”‡ are little regarded.

Of a widely different character from this fervour of selfishness is that genuine Christian zeal, which has ever formed a distinguishing feature of the disciple of our Lord. Enlightened by the word of God, and quickened into operation by the love of Christ, it both shines and warms at the same moment. It is, indeed, the fire of heavenly love kindled into a flame, exciting in the subject of this holy affection the most tender desires and constant efforts for the best interests of every child of man, so far as its sphere can reach—and bounded only by a consistent regard to the general welfare of the whole. Thus earnest and compassionate in its influence, awakened to a sense of the preciousness of immortal souls, and the overwhelming importance of eternity, it is never at a loss to discover a widely extended sphere for its most vehement and constraining exercises. While it hates the sins that pass on every side before its view, it is all gentleness to the sinner, and would gladly endeavour to weep tears of blood over those who are deaf to the voice of persuasion, if such tears could have any power to turn them from their iniquity. But, knowing

* James iii. 15.

† Luke ix. 54, 55.

‡ Matt. xxiii. 23.

all human unassisted efforts to be insufficient, it exhibits itself to the world in protesting against the abominations which it is too feeble to prevent, and then hastens to the secret chamber to pour out its wrestling desires in the tenderness of our Master's intercession—"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."*

Such zeal, we mark illustrated in the Ancient Lawgiver, whose spirit (though as it regarded his own cause "meek above all the men which were upon the face of the earth,"†) "waxed hot,"‡ on witnessing the grievous dishonour done to his God during his absence on the Mount. At the same time, as if more clearly to distinguish the burning of Christian zeal from the natural heat of an unrenewed spirit, we find his self-devotion for his people as influential in secret pleading in their cause, as his boldness and concern for the honour of his God had manifested itself before the congregation of the Lord.§ Surely he could have taken up this language—"My zeal hath consumed me, because mine enemies have forgotten thy words." Burning with the same holy flame, we find the great Old Testament Reformer bearing his testimony against the universal prevalence of idolatry, and making use of the arm of temporal power,|| and of the yet greater power of secret complaint,¶ to stem the torrent of iniquity. Thus did the same impulse in later times mark the conduct of the Apostles, when "rending their clothes, and running in among" a frantic multitude of idolaters—by all the power of their entreaties they were scarcely able to restrain the people, "that they had not done sacrifice unto them."** On another occasion, the great Apostle—forgetting "the goodly stones and buildings" that met his eye at Athens—found "his spirit stirred up within him, when he saw the city wholly given unto idolatry."††

But "compassed as we are about with so great a cloud of witnesses"‡‡ to the influence of this Christian principle, let us yet turn aside to look unto One greater than them all—to One whose example in every temper of Christian conduct affords equal direction and encouragement—who could testify to his Father by the mouth of the Psalmist—

* Luke xxiii. 34. † Numb. xii. 3. ‡ Exod. xxxii. 19. § Ibid. 30—32.
 || 1 Kings xviii. 17—40. ¶ Ibid. xix. 10. ** Acts xiv. 13—18. †† Ibid. xvii. 16. ‡‡ Heb. xii. 1.

“The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up” *—and who could put aside even lawful engagements and obligations when they interfered with this paramount demand—“Wist ye not, that I must be about my Father’s business?” † And if we profess to follow him, if we really bear the stamp of a disciple of Jesus, while we shall bear to have our “name cast out as evil” ‡ and even “rejoice that we are counted worthy” § of this shame; we shall at the same time be tender of any reflection on the name of our God, as of our dearest friend and benefactor. We shall feel any slight of his honour as sensitively as if our own reputation were endangered, and we shall be at all times ready to thrust ourselves between, to receive on ourselves any strokes that may be aimed at his cause. This is that combined spirit of self-denial and self-devotedness, that kindles the flame which “many waters cannot quench, neither can the floods drown.” || ‘I could bear,’ said holy Brainerd, ‘any desertion or spiritual conflict, if I could but have my heart burning all the while within me with love to God and desires for his glory.’ ¶ It is, indeed a blessed feeling of delight to “spend and be spent” in the service of him, who for our sakes was even consumed by the fire of his own zeal—“I have a baptism”—said he—“to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished.” **

After all, however, the most satisfactory evidence of our zeal as a Christian principle—is—when it begins at home—in a narrow scrutiny and vehement revenge against the sins of our own hearts. †† Do we mourn over our own forgetfulness of God’s word? Are we zealous to redeem the loss to our Saviour’s cause from this sinful neglect? And are we making it plain that our opposition to sin in the ungodly is the opposition of love? And is this love manifested to the persons and souls of those, whose doctrines and practice we are constrained to resist—and in a careful regard that we use not unhallowed “carnal weapons” in this spiritual “warfare?” ‡‡

But the weak timid child of God may be saying—“I am so distrustful; I can do nothing for my God. I suffer his

* Psalm lxi. 9, with John ii. 17. Isa. lix. 17. † Luke ii. 49. ‡ Ibid. vi. 22. § Acts v. 41. || Can. viii. 7. ¶ Brainerd’s Diary. Edwards’ Works, iii. 107. ** Luke xii. 50. †† Comp. 2 Cor. vii. 11. Rev. iii. 19. ‡‡ See 2 Cor. x. 4. James i. 20.

law to be forgotten, with little, or no success in my endeavour to prevent it. But do you not love his cause? Is not his honour dear to you as your own? Then take courage, and let your secret chambers witness to your zeal, and the Lord "will not be unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love."* You may be found in the end to have made as effectual resistance to the progress of sin by your intercession before God, as those who have been enabled to manifest a more open front in the face of the world.

140. THY WORD IS VERY PURE; THEREFORE THY SERVANT
LOVETH IT.

THE love which David here expresses for the law of his God, may account for the zeal which he felt for that neglect of it, which he witnessed in the world. How interesting is it to compare the word of God with other systems of religion, (or rather systems of "philosophy, falsely so called,") which allure their votaries by the promises of indulgence, either to their lusts and carnal desires, or to the pride and self-complacency of their natural heart! And how blessed the consideration that the word of our God outweighs them all in its chief excellency, which is indeed peculiar to itself—its purity! This, indeed, as separating the believer in taste and spirit from the world around him, constitutes the real ground of his love to it. The scholar may admire the word of God, but it is the exclusive character of God's servant, that he loves it. The man of literature delights in it for its sublimity; the servant of God loves it for its holiness. Perhaps the scholar would love as well as admire it, if it were not a revealer of secrets, such as the pride of his own heart struggles to conceal from himself; but the sight of his own self-deceitfulness is too revolting to be endured, and therefore the holiness of the revelation of God excites nothing but enmity. The uncompromising strictness of the precepts is too uncongenial with the inclinations of the flesh to invite his love, so that from the glass which shows "his natural face," his immense danger, and his appalling prospects, he turns away in disgust. How evident, therefore, is it, that with the indulgence of sin, the most industrious search into the

* Heb. vi. 10.

word of God must become utterly fruitless! The heart must undergo an entire renewal—it must be sanctified and cleansed, yea, be “baptized with the Holy Ghost,”* before it can discern, or, when it has discerned, can love, the purity of the word of God. Witness the ardent breathings of Brainerd’s soul, as illustrative of this view of the blessed word—‘O that my soul were holy as he is holy! O that it were pure, even as Christ is pure; and perfect, as my Father in heaven is perfect! These I feel are the sweetest commands in God’s book, comprising all others.’† ‘O how refreshing,’ exclaims the beloved Martyn, ‘and supporting to my soul was the holiness of the word of God! Sweeter than the sweetest promise at this time, was the constant and manifest tendency of the word to lead men to holiness and the deepest seriousness.’‡ In connexion with this property of the word of God, is the nourishment afforded by it. As the support of “milk to the new-born babe,” it is to be daily “desired, that we may grow thereby,”§—grow in purity of heart and conduct, learning to shrink from the touch of sin, and, “cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”|| In proportion to our growth in grace, and as an evidence of that growth, will be our appetite for this precious food: and in “esteeming it more than our necessary food,”¶ its holy enjoyment will be abundantly realized.

But while we love the purity that pervades every page of the word of God, let us not overlook the character of that purity, imbodyed and illustrated in the perfect pattern of him, “who was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.”** And let us take it as an additional excitement to our love. For it is the habit of beholding the Saviour with the eye of faith, that conforms the heart to his image.†† But be it ever remembered, that the holiness of the word can have no fellowship, and communicate no life, except in its own atmosphere. If, then, we expect our souls to be invigorated with its supports, let there be habitual prayer for the influence of the Holy Spirit, that our hearts may be purified; and our obedience be active, cheerful, and delightful.

* Matt. iii. 11. † Edwards’ Works, iii. 171. ‡ Martyn’s Life, page 206, 207. § 1 Peter ii. 2. || 2 Cor. vii. 1. ¶ Job xxiii. 12. ** Heb. vii. 26. †† Compare 2 Cor. iii. 18.

141. I AM SMALL AND DESPISED; YET DO NOT I FORGET THY PRECEPTS.

THE Lord has been pleased to "choose the foolish, the weak, and the base things of the world, to confound the wise, and the things which are mighty, that no flesh should glory in his presence."* It is, therefore, no wonder, that the objects of his sovereign choice, whom he has stamped as a "peculiar treasure unto him above all people,"† and whom he will at the day of his appearing exhibit to the world as the "jewels"‡ of his crown, should in the estimation of men be "small and despised." And, indeed, a consciousness of their own unworthiness, and a deep sense of the unmerited kindness vouchsafed to them, leads them to appropriate to themselves this character, and to accept the portion entailed upon it. But what garb will not the natural pride and hypocrisy of the heart assume in order to gain its end? Even this language of humility, which, when used in sincerity, is exclusively the result of divine teaching, is not unfrequently in the mouth of the professor, to enable him to maintain "a name to live," and to secure a title to a reputable estimation in the Church of God. But let such be asked whether, when they speak of themselves, as small and despised, they are willing to be treated as such. Are they content to be despised by those, whose esteem they had hoped to have secured by the language of self-abasement? When they "take the lowest place," do they feel it to be their only place? Are they prepared to be taken at their word? Or does it never mean, in the eyes of God—"Come, see how humble I am?"§

* 1 Cor. i. 27, 29. † Exod. xix. 5. ‡ Mal. iii. 17.

§ Many hypocrites make great pretences to humility as well as other graces. But they cannot find out what an humble speech and behaviour is, or how to speak and act, so that there may be indeed a savour of Christian humility in what they say or do. That sweet humble air and mien is beyond their art, being not "led by the Spirit," or naturally guided to a behaviour becoming holy humility by the vigour of a lowly spirit within them. And, therefore, they have no other way, but to be much in declaring that they are humble, and telling how they were humbled to the dust at such and such times, and abounding in very bad expressions about themselves—such as—"I have a dreadful wicked heart."—"Oh! this cursed heart of mine," &c.—Such expressions are very often used—not with a heart broken—not with the tears of her that "washed Jesus' feet with her tears"—not as remembering, and being confounded, and never opening their mouth because of their shame when God is pacified—(Ezek. xvi. 63,) but with a light air, or with pharisaical affectation.' Edwards on Affections, Part iii. Sect. vi.

Nor let the believer consider these self-inquiries unnecessary. For a self-annihilating spirit before men, as well as before God, is a high and rare attainment—such a spirit as pervaded Brainerd—that meek and lowly disciple of his Master—who used to express his astonishment, that any one above the rank of “the beasts that perish” could condescend to notice him.* If we are accounted “small and despised,” can we complain of it? Oh! let us think of “him whom man despiseth—of him whom the nation abhorreth,”†—let us think of the “cross which he endured, and of the shame which he despised”‡ for us;—and with such a pattern before our eyes—such a motive touching our hearts, let us be ashamed of our reluctance to “bear his reproach.”

But dost thou, tried believer, love to be low, and still desire to be lower than ever? Yet, “small and despised” as thou art in thine own eyes, and in the eyes of the world, thou art precious in the eyes of him, who gave a price for thy ransom—ininitely more precious than Egypt, Ethiopia, and Seba,§ and who will suffer “none to pluck thee out of his hands.”|| Many may rebuke thee; many may scorn thee; even thy brethren may treat thee with contempt; yet thy God, thy Redeemer, will not depart from thee, will not suffer thee to depart from him, but “will put his Spirit within thee,” and bring both his precepts to thy remembrance, that thou mayest keep them, and many a sweet supporting promise for thy consolation. Therefore, “Fear not, thou worm Jacob; I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.”¶

142. THY RIGHTEOUSNESS IS AN EVERLASTING RIGHTEOUSNESS,
AND THY LAW IS THE TRUTH.

THE Psalmist was little in danger in the midst of his trials of “forgetting the precepts of his God,” while he ap-

* ‘God feeds me with crumbs. Blessed be his name for any thing.—I felt a great desire that all God’s people should know how mean, and little, and vile I am, that they might see I am nothing, that so they might pray for me aright, and not have the least dependence upon me.—I could not bear to think of Christians showing me any respect. I saw myself exceedingly vile and unworthy, so that I was ashamed that any one should bestow any favour upon me, or show me any respect.’—BRAINERD’S DIARY.

† Isa. xlix. 7. Compare Psalm xxii. 6. ‡ Heb. xii. 2. § Comp. Isa. xliiii. 3, 4, with Acts xx. 28. || John x. 28. ¶ Isaiah xli. 14.

peared to maintain so just a perception of the exalted character of their Author. Indeed, at this time his mind seems to have been filled with the contemplation of the righteous government of God. He therefore repeats his act of adoration,* not as applied to any particular instance of his dispensations, but as distinguishing the general character of his administration from “everlasting.” And when we consider on whose shoulders the government is appointed to rest—that it is no other than the government of “Immanuel, God with us,”† how delightful is the ascription of praise—“thy throne, O God, is for *ever and ever*: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.”‡ “Of the increase of his government and peace”—as the evangelical prophet assures us—“there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever.”§ “Every ordinance of man” is connected only with time. The government of God has a constant reference to the eternity that is past and to that which is to come. “And I heard,” said the enraptured disciple, “the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus.”|| Every instance, therefore, that we witness of his “righteousness” is the same display of his Divine character, that he has ever exhibited to the admiring view of his intelligent creatures. His law is the manifestation of his “righteousness,” and his “law is the truth.” “Thy word is true from the beginning, and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.”¶

Nor let it be forgotten, that it was this “truth,” that Jesus came into the world to “fulfil—all righteousness.”** It was to this truth that he came to bear witness. “To this end,” replied he to his judge, “was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I might bear witness unto the truth.”†† It is this truth, that he employs as the means of sanctification to his people—“Sanctify them,” said he in his commendatory prayer, “through thy truth: thy word is truth.”‡‡ And, indeed, how does every word bear the impress of a “God that cannot lie!”§§ And who can forbear to see that the whole revelation is “ordered in all things”

* Comp. Verse 137. † Isaiah ix. 6. ‡ Psalm xlv. 6, with Heb. i. 8. § Isa. ix. 7. || Rev. xvi. 5. ¶ Verse 160. ** Matt. iii. 15. †† John xviii. 37. ‡‡ Ibid. xvii. 17. §§ Titus i. 2.

beyond human contrivance, “and sure”* beyond the possibility of a change? The truth of his promises has been sealed by the dying testimony of many of his people. Joshua,† Simeon,‡ and “a cloud of witnesses with which we are compassed,”§ have “set to their seals that God is true”||—that “all the promises of God are in Christ Jesus yea and amen”¶—that “all are come to pass unto them, and not one thing hath failed thereof.” Nor is the truth of his threatenings less manifest. Hell is truth seen too late. Those on the right hand and those on the left at the great day of God will, therefore, alike give testimony to the declaration of “the Faithful and True Witness,”**—“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.”††

143. TROUBLE AND ANGUISH HAVE TAKEN HOLD ON ME, YET THY COMMANDMENTS ARE MY DELIGHTS.

To be accounted “small and despised,” does not comprise the whole of the believer’s trials. He has to expect not only “trouble” without, but also “anguish” within. So the great apostle experienced—“Without are fightings, within are fears. We are pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life.”‡‡ But though “troubled on every side,” the child of God is “not distressed.”§§ “Mercy encompasseth him about.”||| Such is the power of the word of God in not only keeping him from utter despondency, but in exhibiting such cheering prospects of hope and deliverance, and in the mean time affording such powerful supports, that he is enabled, even under his deepest trials, to exercise the feeling of *delight*! The records of the trials of the Lord’s people are peculiarly interesting in this light: not only those that are recorded in the Scriptures, and which have been frequently noticed, but every fresh testimony given to us in the lives of those who have suffered for the cause of Christ, or who have in other ways “been partakers of his sufferings.”¶¶ The record of their afflictions is uniformly coupled with that of their supports drawn from the word of God—thus adding

* 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. † Jos. xxiii. 14. ‡ Luke ii. 25—29. § Heb. xii. 1.
 || John iii. 33. ¶ 2 Cor. i. 20. ** Rev. iii. 14. †† Matt. xxiv. 35.
 ‡‡ 2 Cor. vii. 5; i. 8. §§ 1b. iv. 8. ||| Ps. xxxii. 10. ¶¶ 1 Peter iv. 13.

fresh proof of the inexhaustible resources of this blessed book. And thus "through patience and comfort of the Scriptures we have hope."* Let us learn then to set a higher value upon the word of God, and let us never forget that, however tempting may be the allurements held out to unfaithfulness or disobedience, "in keeping his commandments there is great reward."† But it is only, as we have before had occasion to remark, when we make "the commandments our delights," that we find them to be our supports. A spirit of bondage knows nothing of this blessedness. The sinner cannot brook their strictness, until he has been disciplined to the humbling path-way of the cross.

But how shall we know whether they are our "delights?" We know that the object of our interest is the frequent, if not the continual, subject of our thoughts. If, then, our thoughts are habitually occupied with the word of God, though little of its sensible comfort is experienced, yet there will be a witness within, "that God is with us of a truth."

And if believers, making use of their gracious permission, are enabled to "cast all their cares upon him that careth for them,"‡ and, in the exercise of this blessed privilege, can even rejoice in their adversity, how much more may they "rejoice in tribulation," when it is for the Lord's sake; when the "trouble and anguish which take hold of them" is for the love they bear to his dear name!§ Persecution for his sake, far from appalling the true follower of the Lord, only endears his service to his heart. It is in his eyes a gracious privilege "not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his name's sake."||

But contrast the condition of the ungodly with the people of God at such a time as this. With the one, in the midst of his troubles, the Fountain of all-sufficiency is his portion, and the streams are flowing on every side; and such is his peace and security, that "in the floods of great

* Rom. xv. 4. † Psalm xix. 11. ‡ 1 Peter v. 7. § Acts v. 41.

|| Phil. i. 29. One of the witnesses for the truth, when imprisoned for conscience' sake in Queen Mary's persecution of the church, is said to have thus written to a friend. 'A prisoner for Christ! What is this for a poor worm? "Such honour have" not "all his saints."' Both the degrees which I took in the University have not set me so high as the honour of becoming a prisoner of the Lord.' Philpot, again, could say of his prison—'In the judgment of the world we are in hell; but I find in it the sweet consolations of heaven.'—So, also, holy Bradford—'My prison is sweeter to me than any parlour, than any pleasure I have had in all my life.'

waters they shall not come nigh unto him.”* With the other, “in the fulness of his sufficiency he is in straits.”† David could look upward, and find the way of escape in the midst of his trouble; but with Saul, when “trouble and anguish took hold of him,” no source of comfort opened to his view. “God was departed;” “God was afar off, and was become his enemy.”‡ It was therefore “trouble” without support; “anguish” without relief—“trouble and anguish,” such as will at length take hold of them that forget God, when nothing will be left but the unavailing “cry to the mountains and the hills to fall upon them and cover them.”§ Thanks be to God, such a prospect belongs not unto us: the hope of eternity revives us: if it be not well now, it shall be well for ever. “Say ye to the righteous, It shall be well with him.”||

144. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THY TESTIMONIES IS EVERLASTING;
GIVE ME UNDERSTANDING, AND I SHALL LIVE.

FROM the contemplation of the righteousness of the character and government of God, the Psalmist passes, as he had lately done before,¶ to the recollection of his testimonies, which, equally with his government, he acknowledges to be “everlasting”—not subject to the incessant variations of the human standard of equity, but “for ever settled in heaven.”** And it is this character of his word—stamped with the inscription of its Divine original—that gives most solemn weight and authority to its dictates. It seems indeed to be trampled under foot, as if unrighteousness was now directing the government of the world; but its “righteousness” will not be mitigated in its demands, nor altered in its obligations, but will ere long assert its sovereignty over the world, when every other standard shall have passed away. It will be the rule of the Divine procedure at the great day of decision. When the “great white throne” is set up—when “the dead, small and great, stand before God—and the books are opened, and another book is opened, which is the book of life—and the dead are judged out of those things which were written in the books, *according to their works*”††—the universal ac-

* Psalm xxxii. 6. † Job xx. 22. ‡ 1 Sam. xxviii. 15, 16. § Rev. vi. 16.
|| Isaiah iii. 10. ¶ Verses 137, 138. ** Verse 89. †† Rev. xx. 11, 12.

knowledge will be made from heaven and earth—"The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting."

But this view of the deep and unsearchable nature of their "righteousness," and their everlasting obligation upon our consciences and conduct, naturally suggests the prayer for a more spiritual, enlightened, and experimental acquaintance with them—"Give me understanding." Let me know their holiness—their extent—their perfection—their intimate connexion with every part of my daily walk, with the restraint of my inclination, the regulation of my temper, the direction of every step of my path. And, indeed, the more devoutly we study "the righteousness of the testimonies of God," the more shall we feel our need of supplication for Divine teaching; while, as the effect of this teaching, our views of the government of God will be more adoring and thankful, and our disposition to find fault with what is confessedly beyond the reach of our comprehension will be subjugated to the humbling influence of faith. The peculiar blessing of this perception of the Divine testimonies is, that it is the principle of spiritual and eternal life in the soul. The believer cries—"Give me understanding, that I may live." For "this is life eternal, that we might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."* But how "can we by searching find out God,"† except as he has revealed himself in his "testimonies?" As then we "have an unction from the Holy One, and know all things,"‡ our knowledge of the testimonies will become more spiritual in its character, more experimental in its comforts, and more practical in its fruits. And thus, "the life of God in the soul" will be invigorated, urging us on to higher attainments in evangelical knowledge, and more steady advancement in Christian progress. We see the Lord's people "forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before." "Let us, therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded; and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you."§

* John xvii. 3. † Job xi. 7. ‡ John ii. 20. § Phil. iii. 13—15.

PART XIX.

145. I CRIED WITH MY WHOLE HEART; HEAR ME, O LORD; I WILL KEEP THY STATUTES.—146. I CRIED UNTO THEE; SAVE ME, AND I SHALL KEEP THY TESTIMONIES.

THIS is indeed the language of prayer—the “pouring out of the soul before the Lord”^{*}—a beautiful and encouraging picture of a soul wrestling with God in a few short sentences, with as much power and success as in the most continued length of supplication! Brief as the petitions are, the whole compass of language could not make them more comprehensive. “Save me”—includes every thing that a sinner can need—pardon—acceptance—holiness—strength—comfort—heaven—all in one word—Christ.—“Hear me”—The soul is in earnest—the “whole heart” is engaged in the “cry.” It is the cry of a “prince that has power with God, and prevails.”[†] The sinner is “directing his prayer and looking up.”[‡] As the cripple at the “beautiful gate of the temple”—so is he found “watching daily at the gates”[§] of his God, “expecting to receive something of him.”^{||} Again and again he comes, knowing that the most frequent comers are the largest receivers. He is always wanting—always asking—living upon what he has, but still hungering for more. With many, however, the ceremony of prayer is every thing, and there is no thought, no desire, no anxiety, no waiting for an answer. And how many, too, whose experience has borne testimony to the sweetness of this privilege of prayer, yet are often content with the barren performance of the duty. But ‘the great object of prayer,’ as Augustine excellently remarks, ‘is the enjoyment of God.’[¶] And was there not a time with you, believer, when you were never satisfied with the act of

^{*} 1 Sam. i. 15. [†] Gen. xxxii. 28. [‡] Ps. v. 3. [§] Prov. viii. 34. ^{||} Acts iii. 5.

[¶] ‘The great object in prayer should constantly be the enjoyment of God; and, however inadequate the believer’s conceptions may be, yet he has a distinct idea of his object; so distinct, that you can never impose upon a real saint by offering him something else in the room of it. He knows what he wants, and he knows that this or that is not the thing which he wants.’—Aug. Epis. 121.

In the same Epistle he very judiciously recommends the use of short and quick ejaculations, like these under consideration, rather than long protracted supplications, unless the mind be in a fervent frame; in which case, the petitions, as he justly conceives, may be indefinitely prolonged, without incurring the censure implied in Matthew vi. 7.

prayer without communion with your God, and when your Saviour's presence was never lost, but you "sought it carefully with tears?" Now these verses may teach you how your lost blessing may be recovered, and your walk established with increased care and simplicity with your God. You lament your deficiencies, your weakness in the hour of temptation, your indulgence of ease, your unfaithfulness of heart. But oh! let your "cry" be continually ascending "with your whole heart." The reason why your soul is so empty of comfort, is because your mouth is so empty of prayer. The Lord is never angry with your presumption in coming so often, and asking so much, but he is often ready to "upbraid you with your unbelief,"* that you are so reluctant in your approach, and so straitened in your desires—that you are so unready to receive what he is so ready to give—that your vessels are too narrow to take in his full blessing—that you are content with drops when he has promised "floods,"—"rivers of living water,"†—and, above all, that you are so negligent in praising him for what you have already received. It is this spirit of heart-felt "continued instancy in prayer,"‡ that keeps the child of God in the hour of temptation, and is the main-spring of his spiritual life. If, indeed, temptation is every where every moment, how can it be conceived, that the customary service of morning and evening supplication (even supposing it to be sincere) can be sufficient to meet the emergency? "The whole armour of God" must be "put on" continually, and buckled on by unceasing prayer in the influence of the Spirit.§ But often is the Christian constrained to acknowledge, that his heart has had little to do with the cry of his lips. The hypocrite, indeed, would be satisfied with this, and look no farther: but the child of God is ashamed, and mourns in the dust. "Behold, I am vile!"|| Yet still he cries, sometimes with a cry that probably finds no utterance with his lips¶—that vents itself only with tears, or "groanings that cannot be uttered."** And shall such a cry fail to "enter into the ears of the Lord

* Mark xvi. 14. † Isaiah xlv. 3. John vii. 38. ‡ Rom. xii. 12.

§ Eph. vi. 13—18. 'The violence of temptation stupifies me,' said Luther on one occasion, speaking of his own experience, 'that I cannot open my mouth. As soon as ever it pleases God that I can lift up my heart in prayer, and make use of scriptural expressions, it ceases to prevail.'—Milner, vol. v. p. 484.

|| Job xl. 4, also xlii. 5, 6. ¶ Exod. xiv. 15. 1 Sam. i. 13. Neh. ii. 4.
** Rom. viii. 26.

of Sabaoth?" Impossible! "The Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping. Lord, all my desire is before thee, and my groaning is not hid from thee."*

But why is the believer so earnest for an audience?—why so restless in his cries for salvation? Is it not that he loves the precepts of his God, that he is grieved on account of his inability to keep them, and that he longs for grace and strength ever to be found in them? "Hear me; I will keep thy statutes. Save me; and I shall keep thy testimonies"—and a most satisfactory evidence of a heart upright with God.

Lord! thou knowest how hard we find it to bring our hearts really to the work of prayer; and how we nourish our unbelief by our distance from thee. O pour upon us this "Spirit of grace and supplication." "Teach us to pray"†—even our hearts—"our whole hearts"—to "cry unto thee." Then shall we "run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge our hearts."‡

147. I PREVENTED THE DAWNING OF THE MORNING, AND CRIED;
I HOPED IN THY WORD.—148. MINE EYES PREVENT THE NIGHT
WATCHES, THAT I MIGHT MEDITATE IN THY WORD.

THE Psalmist here brings before us not only the fervency, but the seasons, of his supplication. Like Daniel, he had his set times of prayer—"three times a day."§ Nor did this frequency of seeking the Lord satisfy him, without an habitual "waiting all the day upon his God;"|| and thus the frame of his life and experience was agreeable to his own expression—"I gave myself unto prayer;"¶ for prayer was indeed the atmosphere and the element in which he lived. His sketch of the character of the "blessed man delighting in the law of his God, and" as an evidence of his delight, "meditating therein day and night"***—furnished an accurate but unconscious picture of himself. For early and late was he found in the enjoyment of the privileges of the word of God, "preventing the dawning of the morning" for prayer, and again "the

* Psalm vi. 8. xxxviii. 9. † Luke xi. 2. ‡ Verse 32. § Psalm lv. 17, with Daniel vi. 10. || Psalm xxv. 5.

¶ Psalm cix. 4. 'But I prayer,' Heb.—all over prayer—always ready for prayer—at all seasons, besides the frequency of set times of communion—one, whose life is a continued prayer—"prayer without ceasing."—1 Thess. v. 17.

*** Psalm i. 2.

night-watches, that he might meditate in the word." But to look above the example of David to David's Lord; surely "it was written" most peculiarly "for our learning," that Jesus—after a laborious Sabbath, every moment of which appears to have been spent in the service of sinners, and when his body, subject to the same infirmities, and therefore needing the same refreshment with our own, seemed to require repose—"in the morning, rising up a great while before day, went out and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed."* On another occasion did his "eyes prevent the night-watches" when intensely engaged in the service of his Father and of his Church. For when about to lay the foundation of his Church by the appointment of the Apostles to the ministry of his word, it is told of him, that "he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God."†

With such examples, therefore, as these before us, who can doubt, but that, when the heart is really occupied for God, time will always be found for secret duties,‡ and rather will be redeemed, as with David, from sleep, than lost from prayer. To see a man like the King of Israel, engaged in the most active employments of life, yet "sanctifying" such frequent seasons in the short period of each successive day "with the word of God and prayer," exposes the insincerity of the excuse, that no time can be spared from the pressing avocations of the day for the service of God. It is not that such men are busy and have no time for prayer, but that they are worldly and have no heart to pray.

But we cannot forbear the remark, illustrated by this subject, and warranted by the uniform experience of the Lord's people—how much our spirituality of desire and enjoyment depends upon the daily consecration of the first fruits

* Mark i. 21—35. † Luke vi. 12—16.

‡ Most instructive is the example of Mr. Cadogan, as recorded by his admirable biographer. 'Feeling strongly, that he must walk with God in secret at any rate, when he had company, he would often retire from them into his study, rather than omit his accustomed waiting upon his God. Often has he been found there, when most of the family were gone to rest, surprised on his knees by the domestic, who usually took care of the house.'—Cecil's Life of Cadogan.

Perhaps in an observation once made by an excellent minister, the importance of the truth may furnish an apology for the quaintness of the dress. 'If you did not plough in your closet, you would not reap in the pulpit.'

of our time to the Lord. Probably with some of us opportunities for heavenly communion during the day may be unavoidably straitened. Need we remind such, that “the night-watches” and “the dawning of the morning” afford seasons free from interruption, when your God expects to hear from you, and when the refreshment of your visits to him, and his abidance with you, will often constrain you to acknowledge—“Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ?”* The thoughts of God were clearly the first visiters to David’s waking mind,† and to this may be ascribed in a great measure his habitual success in realizing the presence of God throughout the day. For must we not often trace our lukewarmness, and our want of spiritual enjoyment, to that morning indolence, which not only throws the business of the day into confusion, but also consumes the time in self-indulgence or trifling, which should have been redeemed for this sacred privilege of intercourse with God? For—not to speak of the seasonableness of the early hours for devotion—the very exertion made to overcome “this lust of the flesh,” and to steal a march upon the demands of the world, is an exercise of self-denial, and an opportunity of honouring God, that “shall in no wise lose its reward.” If there should not be actual enjoyment, yet let there be a waiting expectant frame—“I hoped in thy word.” This is a frame peculiarly honourable to the Lord, and a sure earnest of an enlarged blessing. It is a laying hold on the word, as the word of promise; and a resting of the soul upon this hope set before it.‡ If “faith

* 1 John i. 3. † See Psalm cxxxix. 17, 18.

‡ One of Melancthon’s correspondents describes Luther thus:—‘I cannot enough admire the extraordinary cheerfulness, constancy, faith, and hope of the man in these trying and vexatious times. He constantly feeds these gracious affections by a very diligent study of the word of God. Then not a day passes in which he does not employ in prayer at least three of his *very best hours*. Once I happened to hear him at prayer. Oh! what spirit and what faith is there in his expressions. He petitions God with as much reverence as if he was in the Divine presence, and yet with as firm a hope and confidence as he would address a father or a friend.’ ‘I know,’ said he, ‘thou art our Father and our God, and therefore I am sure thou wilt bring to naught the persecutors of thy children. For shouldst thou fail to do this, thine own cause being connected with ours, would be endangered. It is entirely thine own concern. We by thy providence have been compelled to take a part. Thou, therefore, wilt be our defence.’ Whilst I was listening to Luther praying in this manner at a distance, my soul seemed on

cometh ” ultimately “by the word of God,”* it is rather as the word of promise than the word of command. There can, indeed, be no acting of faith in the neglect of prayer. But the main exercise of faith in prayer, and that which gives to it its chief life, hope, and joy—is the view of God as a promising God. The word of God is the foundation of faith, and therefore to “hope in this word” is to “build up ourselves upon our most holy faith.”† Every hope must fail, if we do not lay all our desires, all our cares, all our weights and burdens, upon the solid unsinking foundation of the word of promise. Who can point to one jot or tittle of this word that has not been made good? But how can faith be exercised, if the promise be out of sight and out of mind? Let it then be the food of our meditation, and the ground of our support, when our suit seems to hang at the throne of grace without any tokens of present acceptance or consolation! Often, when cast down by the sense of our wants, the full, free, and firm promise of the word will raise us up, and supply strength for fresh conflict and the earnest of blessed victory. There is ever ground sure enough for faith. The Lord ever furnish us with faith enough for our daily work, conflict, consolation, and establishment.

149. HEAR MY VOICE ACCORDING UNTO THY LOVING-KINDNESS; O LORD, QUICKEN ME ACCORDING TO THY JUDGMENT.

IN the eyes of the world, David appeared “in all his glory,” when seated on his throne and surrounded with the magnificence of his kingdom. But never did he appear so glorious in the sight of God, as when presenting himself in the character of a suppliant before the mercy-seat. Here we see him seeking an audience of the King of kings, and admitted into his presence, only to send up reiterated cries for quickening grace. Of this he felt his continual need, and this therefore he made the burden of unceasing supplication. And do not I need the same grace every moment in every duty? Does not “the gift of God within me”‡

fire within me, to hear the man address God so like a friend, and yet with so much gravity and reverence; and also to hear him, in the course of his prayer, insisting upon the promises contained in the Psalms, as if he were sure his petitions would be granted. “I hoped in thy word,” Milner’s History, vol. v. p. 565. Again referred to—Scott’s Continuation, vol. i. p. 77.

* See Rom. x. 17. † Jude 20. ‡ 2 Tim. i. 6.

need to be daily “stirred up?” Are not “the things that remain,” often “ready to die?”* Then “hear my voice, O Lord; quicken me.” But let me seek to “order my cause before God.” If I would urge my suit successfully, I must “fill my mouth with arguments.”† And if I can plead any thing from the character of my Judge favourable to my cause, if I can prove that promises have been made in my behalf, these will be most encouraging earnestness of a successful issue. Now David had been so used thus to plead in cases of extremity, that arguments suited to his present distress were always ready at hand. When he comes, therefore, as a poor sinner to ask for mercy and grace in time of need, he accompanies his petition with pleas of irresistible power, reminding God of his own character of “loving-kindness and judgment,” as affording the hope that mercy would be vouchsafed to him abundant in measure and seasonable in application.

And with how much greater advantage than ever may these pleas now be urged before our God!—With what full assurance of faith,‡ may I now ask to be heard on account of that transcendent proof of “loving-kindness” manifested in the gift of God’s dear Son—not only as his chiefest mercy, but as the pledge of every other mercy§—and manifested too at the fittest time||—“according to his judgment”—after the inefficiency of the powers of reason¶ and the sanctions of the law** to influence the heart, had been most clearly displayed. And besides, from my own past experience of the “loving-kindness of God,” may I not draw strong encouragement to faith, and a full persuasion of the Lord’s “judgment” in knowing what I really need; such as will enable me to rise above all difficulties, and to hold fast the enjoyment of waiting for him? Cannot I “set to my seal” that “the Lord is a God of judgment;” and that “blessed are they that wait for him?”†† He knows not only what grace is needed, but at what time. Not a moment sooner will it come; not a moment later will it be delayed. ‘As thou wilt, what thou wilt,‡‡ when thou wilt,’—is the expression of faith and resignation, with which all must be committed to the Lord, waiting for the end, in humility, desire, expectation. And if, in pleading my suit for a

* Rev. iii. 2. † Job xxiii. 4. ‡ Heb. x. 22. § See Rom. viii. 32. || See Gal. iv. 4. ¶ Comp. 1 Cor. i. 21. ** Comp. Jer. xxxi. 31—33. †† Isaiah xxx. 18. ‡‡ Thomas a Kempis.

hearing "according to his loving-kindness," my poor, polluted, lifeless petitions should find no liberty of approach, may I be but enabled to direct one believing look to "the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne,"* and I will not doubt that my feeblest offering shall come up as a memorial before God.

150. THEY DRAW NIGH THAT FOLLOW AFTER MISCHIEF; THEY ARE FAR FROM THY LAW.—151. THOU ART NEAR, O LORD; AND ALL THY COMMANDMENTS ARE TRUTH.

It is the awful character of the ungodly, that "they are far from God's law," not from ignorance, but from wilful enmity. God witnesses against them that "they hate instruction, and cast his words behind them."† And they are not ashamed to consent that "this witness is true," when they "say to God, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways."‡ It is, therefore, no matter of surprise that their enmity to the law should show itself in enmity to the people of God—that those that "are far from God's law" should "draw nigh to follow after mischief."§ But if "they draw nigh," the Lord is nearer still. "I am thy shield"||—saith he to his distressed child, who echoes back the promise—"Thou art my hiding-place, and my shield; I hope in thy word."¶ Such a shield as this Elisha knew, and was enabled to testify of its power to quell the alarm of his terrified servant, when they "drew nigh to follow after mischief." Elisha beheld them, too, but by the eye of faith was enabled to prove—"Thou art near, O Lord;" and when, in answer to his prayer, the Lord opened the eyes of the

* Rev. v. 6. † Psalm l. 17. Comp. Prov. i. 22, 25, 29. ‡ Job xxi. 14.

§ 'He cannot brook the child, that hateth the father; he cannot mind the servant, that careth not for the master. If ye were of the world, the world would love you; ye should dwell quietly. There would be no grief, no molestation, if the devil dwelt in you, (which God forbid!) He would not stir up his knights to besiege your house.... but because Christ dwelleth in you (as he doth by faith) therefore stirreth he up his first-begotten son, the world, to seek how to disquiet you, to rob you, to spoil you, to destroy you; and perchance your dear Father, to try and make known to you and to the world that ye are destinate to another dwelling than here on earth, to another city than man's eyes have seen at any time, hath given or will give power to Satan or to the world to take from you the things which he hath lent you, and by taking away, to try your fidelity, obedience and love towards him, (for ye may not love them above him) as by giving that ye have, and keeping it, he hath declared his love towards you.'—Bradford's Epistles in Fathers of English Church, vol. vi. p. 58, 59.

|| Genesis xv. 1. ¶ Verse 114.

young man, "he saw, and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."*

But near as the Lord is to his people to shield them from their enemies, is he not yet nearer still, when he dwells in their hearts? Here is "his temple,"† his desired habitation, like Zion of old, of which he said, "This is my rest for ever, here will I dwell, for I have desired it"‡—a habitation, which, once possessed of its Divine Inhabitant, will never be left desolate. But what David could say of his earthly persecutors, we may truly say of our spiritual enemies. For the "roaring lion, seeking to devour"§ the insinuating "serpent, which deceiveth the whole world"||—is ever "nigh to follow after mischief," and so much the more dangerous, as his approaches are invisible. And then there is a tempting, insnaring world, ever nigh to alienate our hearts from God; and nearer still than all, a lurking world of sin within, that separates us from communion with our God. But what a blessing to be able to turn habitually and immediately to our strong-hold; to feel, as well as to say,— "Thou art near, O Lord." Though "the High and Lofty One whose name is Holy"¶—though the just and terrible God, yet art thou made nigh to thy people,** and they to thee,†† "by the blood of the Cross." And thou dost manifest thy presence to them in "the Son of thy love." And, indeed, to this Son himself, the nearness of his Father's presence was a source of consolation and support, when "they drew nigh that followed after mischief." "He is near"—said he—"which justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together. Who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold the Lord God will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? So they all shall wax old as doth a garment: the moth shall eat them up."‡‡ "Behold"—said he to his affrighted disciples, as his hour drew near—"the hour cometh, yea is now come, that ye shall be scattered every one to his own, and shall leave me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me."§§ And thus his people, in the recollection of his faithful, ever-present help, set to their seal, "that all his commandments are truth." The mischief that was intended for

* Comp. 2 Kings vi. 14--17. † 2 Cor. vi. 16. ‡ Psalm cxxxii. 13, 14.
§ 1 Pet. v. 8. || Rev. xii. 9. ¶ Isa. lvii. 15. ** Col. i. 20. †† Eph. ii. 13.
‡‡ Isa. l. 8, 9. §§ John xvi. 33.

their souls only serves to prove, that “thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous: with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield.”*

But let us desire, not only that the Lord may be brought near as it respects our interest in him, but that he may be kept near in a way of communion with him. Let our hearts be sacred to the Lord. Let us be most careful to watch against any strangeness with this beloved Friend, and to cultivate a growing cordiality and closeness in our walk with him. In a backsliding state, we must expect to lose the comfort, the realizing sense of this nearness.† In a state of darkness, if we cannot see him near, it is the exercise of faith, to believe that he is near, and the practical influence of faith, to speak and pray,—and think and praise, as “seeing him who is invisible.”‡ In a state of enjoyment, let us anticipate the time when he will be ever near to us.

“And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.”§

152. CONCERNING THY TESTIMONIES, I HAVE KNOWN OF OLD THAT
THOU HAST FOUNDED THEM FOR EVER.

THE conviction, which the Psalmist had just stated of the truth of God’s word, appears to have been founded upon early recollections, which had realized to his mind the sure basis upon which it fixed. And, indeed, this—as a point of immense importance in connexion with the believer’s comfort, and as contrasted with the precarious security of all earthly hopes—is made the subject of express revelation: “The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: *but the word of our God shall stand for ever.*”|| When we see in the Divine testimonies what God engaged and performed for his people of old, the recollection that they are “founded for ever,” gives us an interest in these engagements and expectations. And when we have learnt, that the foundation on which these

* Psalm v. 12. † Cant. v. 2—6. ‡ Hebrews xi. 27. § Rev. xxi. 3. || Isaiah xl. 5—8.

testimonies are built, is no other than the two “immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie,”* we may truly “have strong consolation” in venturing every hope for eternity upon this rock; nor need we be dismayed to see all our earthly dependencies—“the world, and the lust and the fashion of it—passing away before us.”† Yet we are most of us strangely attached to this fleeting scene, even when experience and divine teaching have instructed us in its vanity; and it is not until repeated proofs of this truth have touched us very closely, and threatened the destruction of our dearest consolations, that we take the full comfort of the enduring foundation of God’s testimonies, and of the imperishable character of their treasure.

But the consideration of this subject is fraught with especial support in a dying hour. ‘I am on the borders of an unknown world,’ (may the believer say,) ‘but I have “a hope that maketh not ashamed,”‡ which at this moment of peril is as “an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast,” and in the strength of which I do not fear to plunge into eternity.”’ “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day.”§ I know that he is “the Lord: he changeth not,”|| his word changes not: his testimonies abide the same: “I have known of old, that he has founded them for ever.”’ We look for the removing of those “things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.”¶ The scoffer may say—“If the foundation be destroyed, what can the righteous do?”** Let God himself give the answer—“Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath; for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner; but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.”††

* Hebrews v. 18. † 1 John ii. 17. 1 Cor. vii. 31. ‡ Rom. v. 5. § 2 Tim. i. 12. || Mal. iii. 6. ¶ Heb. xii. 27. ** Psal. xi. 3. †† Isa. li. 6.

PART XX.

153. CONSIDER MINE AFFLICTION, AND DELIVER ME; FOR I DO NOT FORGET THY LAW.

IF it be an aggravation of affliction, when there is no pitying eye or friendly help, it is an aggravation that the believer in his severest trouble can never know. It was, indeed, one of the bitter dregs in the Saviour's "cup of trembling," which had well nigh overwhelmed him with the distress of unmitigated sorrow—"Reproach"—said he in the agony of his soul—"hath broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness; I looked for some to take pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none."* But it was this depth of trial combined with every other part of his unknown sufferings, which made him "such a High Priest as became us,"† "touched with the feeling of our infirmities;"‡ "considering our afflictions," and, "in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, able to succour them that are tempted."§ Mark the tender sympathy with which he considered the affliction of his people in Egypt—"And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their task-masters, for I know their sorrows."|| At a subsequent period of their history, "his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel,"¶—a sweet example of that compassionate interest, with which, "in all his people's afflictions, he is himself afflicted."** Well may his people take encouragement to pray—"Consider mine affliction." "Now, therefore, let not all the trouble seem little before thee that hath come upon us."††

But not only doth he show himself tender to consider us, but mighty to "deliver." "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah! 'Tis he that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, *mighty to save*."‡‡ The consciousness, that "we do not forget his law," furnishes us with a plea to urge before the Lord,

* Psalm lxi. 20. Comp. xxii. 11. † Heb. vii. 26. ‡ Heb. iv. 15. § Ibid. ii. 18. || Ex. iii. 7; also ii. 25. ¶ Judges x. 16. ** Isa. lxiii. 9. †† Neh. ix. 32. ‡‡ Isa. lxiii. 1

that he would not forget to “consider our affliction and deliver us,” and is of itself an evidence, that the affliction has not altogether failed of performing its appointed work. A similar plea is urged again and again in this Psalm—“Save me, *for I have sought thy precepts.* Let thine hand help me, *for I have chosen thy precepts.* Seek thy servant, *for I do not forget thy commandments.*”* Let me then expect in mine affliction the fulfilment of his gracious promise—“Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him.”† In the midst of my trials let me prepare my hymn of praise for his tender consideration and his faithful deliverance—“I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy: for thou hast considered my trouble; thou hast known my soul in adversities, and hast not shut me up in the hand of the enemy; thou hast set my feet in a large room.”‡ Let me then remember my affliction, only as it may be the means of increasing my acquaintance with my tender and Almighty friend. Poor and afflicted as I may be, let me be more poor and afflicted still, if I may but have fresh evidence that he “thinketh upon me”§—that he considers my affliction, and in his own gracious time and way will “deliver me.”

154. PLEAD MY CAUSE, AND DELIVER ME: QUICKEN ME ACCORDING TO THY WORD,

OPPRESSED as the Psalmist appeared to be at this moment, he is at no loss where to apply for help. He carries his righteous cause to him, who “stilleth the enemy and the avenger.”||—“Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me: fight against them that fight against me. Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for my help. Draw out also the spear, and stop the way against them that persecute me: say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.”¶ Thus it is, that in seasons of spiritual conflict he maintains “the patience of hope,”** waiting for the Lord, “until he plead his cause, and execute judgment for him”††—assured,

* Verses 94, 173, 176. † Psalm xci. 14, 15. ‡ Ibid. xxxi. 7, 8. § Ib. xl. 17. || Ib. viii. 2. ¶ Ib. xxxv. 1—3. ** 1 Thess. i. 3. †† Mic. vii. 9.

that if there is an accuser to resist,* there is an Advocate to plead,† who could testify of his prevalent acceptance in the court of heaven—"Father, I thank thee, that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always."‡ Our Redeemer does, indeed, plead our cause successfully for our deliverance, when but for his powerful advocacy we must have stood speechless in the judgment—helpless without any prospect of the restoration of favour or acceptance. Awful, indeed, was the cause which he had to manage. We could neither deny the charge, nor offer compensation for the injury. We could neither "stand in the judgment," nor flee from the impending wrath. But we had at that moment of infinite peril (and we still "have") an Advocate with the Father." The voice that was once heard in heaven exactly answers to this petition for deliverance—"Deliver them from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom"§ —a ransom no less than the price of his own "precious blood,"|| "shed for many for the remission of sins"¶—a ransom, which has merited and obtained eternal "deliverance"*** for his people, and which is expiating by its continual voice of pleading the daily and hourly guilt, which attaches to their holiest services, and defiles their happiest approaches to their God. And thus when Satan accuses me, yea, when my own heart condemns me, I may look upward to my heavenly Advocate—"Plead my cause and deliver me."†† "O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me. Thou wilt answer, O Lord my God."‡‡

Poor trembling sinner, take courage. "Your Redeemer is mighty—he will thoroughly plead your cause,"§§ and leave no charge unanswered. But you can take no comfort. It does not speak to you. Yet if not to you, to whom does it speak? Who needs an advocate more than you? He has, indeed, nothing favourable to plead of you, but much,

* Zech. iii. 1. † 1 John ii. 1. ‡ John xi. 41, 42. § Job xxxiii. 24. || 1 Peter i. 19. ¶ Matt. xxvi. 28. ** Heb. ix. 12.

†† The word translated "deliver me," is taken from the office of a Redeemer or next of kin amongst the Israelites, to whom it belonged to redeem the inheritance, or ransom the person, of his impoverished or enslaved relative; and also to be his patron and defender against injustice and oppression, and the avenger of his blood if he were slain.—Scott.—The use, therefore, of this word in the original in this verse—naturally pointing the believer's attention to him, who is indeed near of kin to him, and has combined all the offices of the ancient Redeemer in his one beloved Person—at once illustrates and warrants the view that is here given of the passage.

‡‡ Isa. xxxviii. 14. Ps. xxxviii. 15. Marg. and P. T. §§ Jer. l. 34.

very much for you. For he pleads the merit of his own blood, “that taketh away the sin of the world”^{*}—even that great sin of “unbelief,” of which his Spirit is now “convincing”[†] you, and which you have been made to feel and lament and resist as the bitterest foe to your peace. And does he not “ever live to make intercession for you?” Why then hesitate to apply the certain and consoling inference, that “he is able to save *to the uttermost*?”[‡]—Why discouraged by the sight of sin, temptation, backsliding, difficulty and fear, arising before you on every side, when after the most extended view has been taken of the prospect of sorrow, this one word “*uttermost*” goes beyond it? But, the more faith in our Advocate is in exercise, the more we shall be constrained to mourn over our sluggishness in his service, and every cry for deliverance will be accompanied with supplication for quickening grace—“Quicken me.” Every moment reminds us of our need of this grace, to hold on our warfare, and to enliven our daily course; and our warrant to expect it is the sure promise of God—“According to thy word.” We need not only the living principle, but its lively operation; not only the fire to kindle the lamp, but the oil to feed the flame. And he that is our Advocate to “plead” for us, and our Saviour to “deliver” us, is also our quickening Head, supplied with “the residue of the Spirit” to “revive his work” in the hearts of his people. It is for this purpose he “hath ascended on high, and hath received gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious, also, that the Lord God might dwell among them.”[§] When, therefore, we want a heart to pray, to praise, to believe, to love, let us only look to an ascended Saviour, sending down the life-giving influence from above, as the purchase of his blood, the fruit of his intercession, and our hope will be enlivened, our faith established, and the graces of the Spirit will be abounding to the glory of our God.

155. SALVATION IS FAR FROM THE WICKED; FOR THEY
SEEK NOT THY STATUTES.

ALL the misery that an immortal soul is capable of enduring throughout eternity is included in this sentence—“Salvation is far from the wicked.” The full picture of it is drawn by our Lord himself—“The rich man died, and

^{*} John i. 29. [†] John xvi. 8, 9. [‡] Heb. vii. 25. [§] Psalm lxxviii. 18.

was buried, and *in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.*”* As it respects the present enjoyment of “salvation,” it is also “far from the wicked.” “There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.”† Their common employments are “sin.”‡ Their “sacrifice is an abomination.”§ Their life is “without Christ, having no hope, and without God in the world.”|| But who can tell the curse of eternity, with this salvation far from them? To be eternally shut out from God—from heaven!—To be eternally shut in with the enemies of God, and the heirs of hell! Fellow Christians—look from what ye have escaped—what ye were, when “ye were sometime afar off”—what ye would have been now and for ever, had ye not “in Christ Jesus been made nigh by the blood of Christ.”¶ But whence is it that the wicked are in this inexpressibly awful condition? Is not “salvation offered to them?” Are they shut out from hope, and sternly refused an interest in the covenant? Oh no; it is their own doing, or rather their own undoing. That “salvation is far from them” is, because “they are far from God’s law.” Every act, according to its power, is a vigorous stride of mind in departure from God. “They seek not his statutes.” They “desire not the knowledge of his ways.” They “say to God—Depart from us.”** God, therefore, will say to them—“Depart from me.”†† It is not then so much God that punishes them, as they that punish themselves. Their own sin, the necessity of the case, punishes them. They “will not come to Christ, that they might have life”‡‡ “so that they are without excuse”§§—die they must.

But who are “the wicked?” Alas! this is a melancholy question, as involving within its sphere so large a proportion of what passes for amiable, virtuous, and lovely, in the estimation of the world. Not to speak of those, whose character is written upon their foreheads too broadly to mistake them, it includes “all that forget God,”||| however blameless the character of their external profession, or however exempt their moral character may be from any unworthy imputation. It is determined upon infallible and immutable authority. It is the decree of our eternal Judge

* Luke xvi. 22, 23, 26. † Isaiah lvii. 21. ‡ Prov. xxi. 4. § Ibid. xv. 8.
 || Eph. ii. 12. ¶ Eph. ii. 13. ** Job xxi. 14. †† Matt. vii. 23; xxv. 41.
 ‡‡ John v. 40. §§ Rom. i. 20. ||| Psalm ix. 17.

—“If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his;”^{*} and if none of his, then it follows in unavoidable consequence, that “salvation is far from him.” Oh! could we but persuade such of their awful state—Oh! could we awake them from their death-like—deadly sleep—slumbering on the borders of eternity! on the brink of ruin! But they are impaled in their own self-esteem, or in the favourable comparison which they may be able to draw between themselves and many around them; forgetting that the rule, by which they will be judged, is not the world’s standard of moral rectitude, but the statutes of a holy, heart-searching God; forgetting too, that all may be decency without, while all is corruption within. Let them bring their hearts to the test of the statutes of God in an honest and prayerful scrutiny, and while they could not fail to be self-condemned by the result of such an inquiry, they would be led by an awakening perception of their danger to cry heartily for salvation,[†] which would not then “be far from them.”[‡] For “the Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him; he will also hear their cry, and *will save them.*”[§]

O thou Almighty Spirit, whose power is alone able to “turn the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just,”^{||} “raise up thy power and come among us,”—“rend the heavens and come down,”[¶]—rend the hearts of these rebellious sinners.—“Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek thy name, O Lord.”^{**}

156. GREAT ARE THY TENDER MERCIES, O LORD: QUICKEN ME ACCORDING TO THY JUDGMENTS.

THE Psalmist, when speaking of the wretched condition of the wicked, is naturally led to adore the mercies of the Lord, which had “made him to differ.” And, indeed, to this source alone must we trace the distinction between those who are “quickened” and those who “are dead in trespasses and sins.” For it is “God who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins,” who “hath quickened us together with Christ; by grace ye are saved.”^{††}

^{*} Rom. viii. 9. [†] Acts xvi. 30. [‡] See Ps. lxxxv. 9. [§] Ps. cxlv. 18, 19.
^{||} Luke i. 17. [¶] Isa. lxiv. 1. ^{**} Psalm lxxxiii. 16. ^{††} Eph. ii. 1, 4, 5.

And truly, when we speak of divine love and divine mercy, we can only speak of it, as "great and tender:" great in its extent, tender in its exercise. "Great" is that first display of Sovereign mercy, which surprises the sinner in his first conversion to God; "tender" is that continued stream of mercies, which follows him through every step of his wilderness journey, which compasses him about, abounds towards him, keeps him steadfast, or restores him when wandering, and preserves him to the end. If then we can join in this sweet acknowledgment—if from a sense of our participation in them, we can say—"Great are thy tender mercies"—the consciousness of the poor returns of love which we have made, will lead us heartily to unite in the petition—"Quicken me according to thy judgments." And how instructive is it to observe David's repeated cries for quickening grace! Not like too many amongst us, who arrive at an easy assurance of their interest in the gospel, and can maintain this assurance in all the carelessness of an idle and unfruitful life. No—he was a believer of a very high standard; he was desirous, not only of proving his title to the covenant blessings, but of living in their habitual enjoyment. We have had this petition brought before us frequently in the course of this Psalm, but it is too important ever to be passed over. Let us at this time use it for the purpose of individual self-inquiry. In what respects do I need quickening grace? What are my views of sin, and especially of the sin of my own heart? Are they slight and superficial? Do they fail in producing humility, abasement, tenderness of conscience, circumspection of conduct? If so, these are symptoms of spiritual deadness. "Quicken me, O my God?" Does my apprehension of a Saviour's love serve to embitter sin to me? to crucify sin in me, to warm and enliven my heart with love to him, and zeal in his service? If I am convicted of coldness to such a Saviour, and sluggishness in such a service, I need to pray—"O Lord, quicken me!" And how do I find it with regard to prayer itself? Are not my prayers general—unfrequent—wandering? Is not my service too often constrained—a forced duty, rather than a privilege and delight? "O Lord, quicken me!"

Such questions, and many others which these may suggest, will be helpful to the necessary duty of self-inspection, and will stir up the prayer for quickening grace. The

evil of a dead and drooping state must not be lightly thought of; for at such times the difference between the believer and the worldling, or at least between the believer and the formalist, is scarcely visible. O believer, you have great need to carry your complaint again and again unto the Lord—"Quicken me—quicken me—according to thy judgments"—according to those gracious promises, which—as the method of thy proceedings, and the rule of the dispensing of thy grace—may well be called "thy judgments." You cannot, believer, be too earnest to welcome the breathings of the Spirit, or too cautious, that you resist not his Divine impression by the indolence of your own spirit. When the Spirit quickens you with his influence, do you quicken him with your supplications—"Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south: blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out."* Persuade—entreat—constrain his stay. Enlivened by his energy, how happy, and in your own sphere how useful, a member of the church of Christ you may be found! Not a day would pass without some fresh contemplation of the Saviour—some fresh act of reliance upon him—some fresh exercise of devotedness to his service. It is for want of this constant excitement, that you so often walk in darkness, that you have so little vigour, liveliness, and refreshment in your duties. The more this spiritual life is "exercised unto godliness," the more enjoyment will be realized in the anticipation of the active service and everlasting praise, which will constitute the perfection of the happiness of the world above. "His servants shall serve him; and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads."†

157. MANY ARE MY PERSECUTORS AND MINE ENEMIES; YET DO I NOT DECLINE FROM THY TESTIMONIES.

"WHICH of you"—said our Divine teacher—"intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?"‡ A most important consideration for those who are setting out in a fair profession of religion! Young Christian, let your course be commenced with time set apart for serious consideration, and most jealous self-scrutiny. Beware of hasty de-

* Cant. iv. 16.

† Rev. xxii. 3, 4.

‡ Luke xiv. 28.

terminations. Examine whether your resources of needful strength for "the race set before you," are derived from your own resolutions, from the sincerity and ardency of your love, or from a simple dependence upon the word of God. Consider the prospects that have probably presented themselves to your mind, whether they are such as are strictly warranted by the blessed book, which is given to you as the "lamp unto your feet, and light unto your path."* If you have led yourself to expect that a life of steady and uniform consistency will command the esteem and respect of an ungodly world, you have forgotten both the word and the example of Him whom you profess to follow—"The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you"†)—and you will soon be ready to exclaim—"Many are my persecutors and mine enemies." If at some times their hostility is not in perceptible exercise, it is not quelled or wearied out. The enmity "is not dead, but sleepeth." It is possible, however, on the other hand, that their unexpected surprisals and inveteracy may be so appalling, that, in counting the cost, you may have little hope of sustaining the conflict. But here you are again forgetting the word that speaks support and encouragement in the most awful crisis—"My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness."‡ Thus by taking "the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left,"§ you will find, that, while presumption is cast down, and self-confidence is humbled, the trembling simplicity of dependence upon an Almighty arm is upheld and honoured—"Many are my persecutors, and mine enemies; yet do I not decline from thy testimonies."

Count, then, upon the difficulties that beset the heavenly path, and gird yourself to meet them. You will never pluck the Rose of Sharon, if you are afraid of being pricked with the thorns which surround it. You will never reach the crown, if you flinch from the cross in the way to it. Oh! think of the honour of bearing this cross. It is conformity to the Son of God. Let the mind be deeply imbued with the remembrance of his daily cross of suffering and reproach, and we shall gladly "go forth without the camp bearing his reproach," and even "rejoicing, if we

* Verse 105. † John xv. 20. ‡ 2 Cor. xii. 9. § Ibid. vi. 7.

are counted worthy to suffer shame ”* with him and for him. Indeed, what love do we profess to bear him, if we will not take up a cross for him? How can we be his followers without his cross?† How can we be Christians, if we are not confessors of Christ before a world that despises his gospel?

But a steady consistent Christian profession is no matter of course. The crown is not easily won. “Many are our persecutors and our enemies.” Yet the secret of perseverance, such as is here expressed, may be illustrated by the experience of the great Apostle. At the time when his “persecutors were many,” and human help even from his friends had failed him—he was enabled to maintain an unshaken confidence in the service of his God—“At my first answer”—he tells us—“no man stood with me, but all men forsook me. Notwithstanding, the Lord *stood with me, and strengthened me.*”‡ David himself had been enabled to acknowledge the same principle of perseverance under similar circumstances of trial, when he appealed to his God in grateful recollection of the protection vouchsafed—“Lord, how are they increased that trouble me? Many are they that rise up against me. Many there be, which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God. But, *thou, O Lord, art a shield for me*; my glory, and the lifter up of my head—O God the Lord, the strength of my salvation, thou hast covered my head in the day of battle.”§

But are we never conscious of taking a devious path in “declining from the Lord’s testimonies,” to escape the appointed cross? Do we never shrink from “the voice of him that reproacheth and blasphemeth, by reason of the enemy and the avenger?” Can we always in the integrity of our heart appeal to an Omniscient God—“All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant; our heart is not turned back, *neither have our steps declined from thy way*; though thou hast sore broken us in the place of dragons, and covered us with the shadow of death?”|| There is no boasting in this confidence of a child of God. Whenever he is enabled to exercise it, he recollects it as the fulfilment of the

* Heb. xiii. 13. Acts v. 41. † See Matt. xvi. 24. ‡ 2 Tim. iv. 16, 17. § Psalm iii. 1—3; cxl. 7. || Psalm xlv. 16—19.

covenant promise—"I will put my fear in their hearts, and they shall not depart from me."* Thus does the promise of perseverance beautifully connect itself with the duty of persevering. And how encouraging is it to remark, that in this, as in every other way, "the wrath of man" ("howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so") "praiseth God,"† in working the eventual good of his people! All the fruit of persecution in a prepared and Christian temper will be to make us more prayerful in our spirit, and more circumspect in our walk. And thus the light of our profession will shine with increasing lustre to the world, and the enjoyment of our Christian privileges will be more habitually known in an even course of holy walking with God.

158. I BEHELD THE TRANSGRESSORS, AND WAS GRIEVED;
BECAUSE THEY KEPT NOT THY WORD.

WE shall not tire in listening to this repeated expression‡ of the tenderness of the Psalmist's heart in his exercises with God. Rather, when we consider the mark of peculiar acceptance which the Lord had sealed upon this feature of his character,§ let every fresh view and recollection of it be followed with some deepened impression upon our too cold and indifferent hearts. Our joys and sorrows are as it were the pulse of our soul, by which our spiritual life and health may at all times be most accurately marked. A fellowship with the joys of the angels of God over repenting sinners|| must be accompanied with bitterness of godly sorrow over the hardness and impenitency of those who "keep not the word of God." But even here in the actings of our hearts, much and earnest prayer is needed, in order to obtain a clear and well digested acquaintance with the real springs and motives of conduct and profession. Sin is so subtle in its nature and workings, that it insinuates itself into our holiest desires, and often so far interweaves itself into the graces of the Spirit, as greatly to mar their beauty, and obstruct their operations. And never do we need greater watchfulness over its power, than in the temper of our zeal for the honour of God. True zeal is, indeed, a precious fruit of the Spirit, whose other name is

* Jer. xxxii. 40. † Compare Isaiah x. 7, with Ps. lxxvi. 10. ‡ Comp. Verses 53, 136. § See Ezekiel ix. 4—6. || Luke xv. 10.

love—active, self-denying, compassionate love for sinners. ‘Let me never fancy I have zeal’—said a Christian of a very high order—‘till my heart overflows with love to every man living.’* If we are then really under the influence of Christian zeal and Christian love, we shall lose no opportunity of active exertions on behalf of wretched “transgressors,” and the limits of our zeal will be only the limits of a fallen world. Especially within our own sphere will labour and pains be employed in seeking to stem the tide of unrighteousness—“saying unto the fools—Deal not foolishly—How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?”†

But the fervency of our zeal will express itself in something more difficult than personal service. We can often warn transgressors, and labour in their cause, when we are sadly backward in sending up sighs and cries on their behalf; and in uncovering these poor lepers in the sight of that great and good Physician, whose “power present to heal”‡ has been so abundantly manifested. Oh! it is hard to reach this frame; but it is a frame of rich unction and refreshment. It is the mind of the compassionate Jesus, who, while he looked round on sinners with anger, “being grieved for the hardness of their hearts,”§ was ready to remember their case in earnest pleadings to his Father—“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”|| And who can hope to “assure his heart before God,” while a stranger to this frame? Can we bear to “behold” all around us united in a conspiracy against the honour, and, if it were possible, against the life of our dearest friend and benefactor, and not be “grieved?”¶ Yet if it be genuine “grief,” it will begin with exercises on account of our sin—“all of us mourning, every one for his iniquity.”** We shall never hear of the wickedness of others without our own conscience stirring the conviction within—“I do remember my faults this day.”†† And when once we begin

* Martyn's Life, p. 192. † Psalm lxxv. 4. Prov. i. 22. Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

‡ Luke v. 17. § Mark iii. 5. || Luke xxiii. 34.

¶ Celerinus in Cyprian's Epistles, acquaints a friend with his great grief for the apostacy of a woman through fear of persecution; which afflicted him so much, that at the feast of Easter (the Queen of feasts in the primitive church) he wept night and day, and resolved never to know a moment's delight, till through the mercy of God she should be recovered.

** Ezek. vii. 16. †† Gen. xli. 9.

the enumeration, where shall we end? "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults?" "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord."*

159. CONSIDER HOW I LOVE THY PRECEPTS; QUICKEN ME,
O LORD, ACCORDING TO THY LOVING-KINDNESS.

THE people of the world neither feel a "love for the Lord's precepts," nor a desire for his quickening grace; but no mark more distinctly characterizes a child of God than that love for the precepts which is delineated throughout this Psalm. For though "his commandments are not grievous" in themselves, yet to the unrenewed, proud, worldly heart, they are an intolerable yoke;† and therefore a love to them, not being the growth of the natural soul, must be a "plant which our heavenly Father hath planted," a witness of the Spirit of adoption, and an encouragement to approach to God with filial confidence. But is the timid, trembling child of God sometimes ready to think that nothing that he can do can be acceptable in the sight of God? all is so weak, so mean, so defiled. Let him take comfort from the recollection of the Lord's readiness to "consider how he loves his precepts." How did he consider Abraham? "*I know Abraham*, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him."‡ Mark also his challenge to "the accuser of the brethren," respecting his servant Job, as a lover of his precepts: "*Hast thou considered my servant Job*, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil?"§

But while believers may enjoy the full confidence of the Lord's consideration of them as "loving his precepts,"—the consciousness of the imperfection and scanty measure of their love will always prevent them from urging it as the ground of their acceptance. Instead, therefore, of the proud boast—"God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are,"—their constant need of quickening influence is mournfully felt. Yet are they too apt to sit still and wait

* Psalm xix. 12; cxliii. 2. † Compare Jeremiah vi. 10. ‡ Genesis xviii. 19. § Job i. 8.

for the breeze, instead of calling to the "north wind to awake, and to the south wind to blow,"* to spread their sails, and urge them on. Though they may be able to say that God, his word, his works, his perfections, his holiness, —Jesus, his pity, his love, his grace—is their delight, their chief delight, yet they know it to be infinitely below the just standard of warranted scriptural expectations.

As often, therefore, as we feel the hinderance of straitened desires and heartless affections, let us repair to the "loving-kindness of the Lord," as the overflowing fountain of life to our soul. Remember—to be "filled,"† is the promise. We have life, but oh! give it us "more abundantly;"‡ as much as these houses of clay—as much as these earthen vessels can contain. And, indeed, the taste that we have enjoyed of the loving-kindness of the Lord, and our knowledge of its unbounded fulness, will furnish a ready plea for more confident expectation before the throne of grace. Often as the Psalmist had repeated his prayer for quickening grace,§ is it once too often? If it be a repetition, at least it is not a "vain repetition."|| Never once was it an empty sound; each time was it enlivened with abundant faith, intense feeling of his necessity, and the vehemency of most ardent affection; and if the consciousness of the faintness of our strength and the coldness of our affections should lead us to offer it a hundred times a day, in such a frame as this, it would never fail of acceptance.

160. THY WORD IS TRUE FROM THE BEGINNING; AND EVERY ONE OF THY RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENTS ENDURETH FOR EVER.

WE can hardly have failed to observe in the Lord's ways of providence with his church collectively, or in the experience of his dealings with our souls, that his word has often seemed on the eve of being falsified, clearly with the design of a brighter and more striking display of its faithfulness. The very night previous to the close of the four hundred and thirty years, Israel was, to all human appearances, as far from deliverance as at any former period. But "the vision

* Can. iv. 16. † Matt. v. 6. ‡ John x. 10.

§ Nine times is this petition urged, verses 25, 37, 40, 88, 107, 149, 154, 156, 159.

|| Compare Matt. vi. 7.

was for an appointed time ;”* nothing could hasten, nothing could delay it ; for “it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, *even the self-same day it came to pass*, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt.”† At a subsequent period of their history, the family of David appeared upon the eve of extinction, and as if the promise of God would fall to the ground ; but “sooner should heaven and earth fail, than one jot or one tittle in any wise pass, until all be fulfilled.”‡ To exhibit “the word of God§ as true from the beginning,” a providential, and almost a miraculous interference was manifested. When Athaliah destroyed all the seed royal of the house of Judah, Joash was stolen away, put under a nurse, hid from Athaliah in the house of the Lord six years, and in God’s appointed time brought forth to the people, as the fulfilment of the express promise of God—“Behold the king’s son shall reign, as the Lord hath said of the sons of David.”|| “Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord.”¶

And thus it is in the experience of his own people. Not one of them will be found who, though tempted in moments of unbelieving despondency to “charge God foolishly,”** has not afterwards, in some unexpected deliverance, been led to “set to his seal” for the honour of his God—“Thy word is true from the beginning.” “The Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, *when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left.*”†† And how sweet is this discovery of the truth of the word of God ! We may have an outward conviction and perception of its truth. We may be able to confute the infidel or the skeptic, and yet be utterly ignorant of the experimental comfort of its truths. But to find, that “it is all true” (as the woman of Samaria found of the doctrine of Christ‡‡) because it answers to our convictions, our wants, and our feelings—to find that the word of God is not only incontrovertible by human reasonings, but that it is exactly suitable to our daily circumstances—to know that the promises are true, because they have been fulfilled in us—this is tasting, feeling, handling—this is indeed blessedness—this makes the word unspeakably precious to us—“a trea-

* Hab. ii. 3. † Exodus xii. 41. ‡ Matt. v. 18. § Comp. 2 Sam. vii. 16. || 2 Chron. xxii. 10—12 ; xxiii. 3. ¶ Psalm cvii. 43. ** Job i. 22. †† Deut. xxxii. 36. Compare 2 Kings xiv. 26, 27. ‡‡ John iv. 29.

sure to be desired.”* To find by our own experience of the comfort of the gospel, that “we have not followed cunningly devised fables,” but that it is “a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”†—this, indeed, is “life from the dead.” Oh! how should we seek to attain this experimental perception of the truth of God’s word. The Israelites were not satisfied with inquiring respecting the manna—“What is this?”‡—or with discovering that it had descended from heaven; but they gathered it each for himself, and fed upon it as their daily bread. Nor will it be of any avail to us to prove beyond contradiction, and to acknowledge with the fullest assurance, the truth of God’s word, unless we thus embrace it and live upon it as our heavenly portion. It is faith alone that can give this spiritual apprehension—“He that believeth hath the witness in himself.”§—But if the word be the truth of God “from the beginning,” it must be eternal truth in its character and its results—like its great Author, in every particular, “enduring for ever.”—“For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven. Thy faithfulness is unto all generations.”||

Lord! give unto us that “precious faith,” by which the acknowledgment of the truth “of thy word” from the beginning, “and its endurance for ever,” may become the spring of continual life and consolation to our souls.

PART XXI.

161. PRINCES HAVE PERSECUTED ME WITHOUT A CAUSE; BUT MY HEART STANDETH IN AWE OF THY WORD.

SUCH was David’s unjust treatment from the hands of Saul¶—persecuted without any cause, except what might arise from envy at his superior excellence**—provoked by repeated and unmerited aggravations, and restrained from open and unlawful violence only by his “heart standing in awe of God’s word.” “The Lord forbid,” said he on one of these occasions, “that I should do this thing unto my mas-

* Prov. xxi. 20. † 1 Tim. i. 15. ‡ Exodus xvi. 15, margin. § 1 John v. 10. || Verses 89, 90. ¶ Verse 23. ** 1 Sam. xviii. 8, 28, 29. Comp. Prov. xxvii. 4.

ter, *the Lord's anointed*, to stretch forth my hand against him, *seeing he is the anointed of the Lord.*"* We mark this frame of mind as characteristic of the Lord's people from the beginning. Joseph,† Nehemiah,‡ and the Jews in his time§—and the three Babylonish captives||—were evidently actuated by this holy principle. Josiah obtained a mark of special acceptance on this account,¶ as answering to the "man, *that trembleth at God's word*," and who will ever be regarded, whether he be found on the throne or on the dunghill, as the man, to whom the Lord "will look."** And certainly, under such circumstances as David's, where the wrath of princes and the wrath of God are weighed against each other, who can doubt, but that it is better to incur the persecution of men, by a decided adherence to the word of God, than the wrath of God, by declining from it?

Our Saviour, knowing what was in man, had clearly foretold these to be the difficulties, with which his followers would have to conflict, and had armed them for the trial with the word of encouragement—"When they bring you into the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say. For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say."†† The trial at the first onset proved too hard for them: Peter's "heart stood in awe" of the "persecuting princes," and in a moment of temptation he disowned his Master; ‡‡ but when "the Spirit of power"§§ was poured from on high, such was the "holy awe" in which himself and his companions "stood of God's word," that they declared in the face of the whole council—"Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." "We ought to obey God rather than men."||| 'I fear God,' Colonel Gardiner used to say, 'and I have none else to fear.' Indeed, the Spirit of adoption, which is the grand feature of the Christian, will never fail to produce a strong and influential fear in the heart—an awe of God, a dread of sinning against the tenderest Father, of grieving the dearest Friend. And this awe of God's character will naturally extend to his word, and we shall be more tenderly afraid of disregarding its dictates than the most faithful subject of breaking the law of

* 1 Sam. xxiv. 6. † Gen. xxxix. 9. ‡ Neh. v. 15. § Ezra ix. 4; x. 3. || Daniel iii. 16—18. ¶ 2 Chron. xxxiv. 26, 27. ** Isaiah lxvi. 2. †† Luke xii. 11, 12. ‡‡ Matt. xxvi. 69—75. §§ 2 Tim. i. 7. ||| Acts iv. 19; v. 29.

his beloved sovereign. There is nothing slavish, nothing legal, in this fear. It is perfectly consistent with gospel freedom, and invariably productive of gospel holiness. It is the very soul of religion; at once the best preservative of the joys and privileges of our experience, and the best evidence of their scriptural character. And never, probably, shall we find this principle of greater service to us, than when suffering, as David was at this period, from unjust persecution. It will keep us from declining from the ways of godliness, through the scorn and ridicule of the world, or from the temptation to regard the ways of the world with a wishful eye. We shall be alike proof against the richest allurements, or the most powerful reproach of men, to go beyond the word of the Lord to do less or more.*

But what must be the frame of that heart, when the word of the great God—the Creator and Judge of the earth—fails to command reverence! Were the sinner to hear a voice from heaven, addressed distinctly to himself, we can hardly conceive of obstinacy or infatuation bold enough to reject it: yet “we have a more sure word, whereunto we do well that we take heed,”† so as to receive it with silent awe, to bow before it with the most unlimited subjection, and to yield ourselves entirely to its holy influence. Let us then beware of forgetting our “awe of this word”—of taking it up as a common book, of “receiving it as the word of man,” and not, “as it is in truth, the word of God.”‡ If it does not stand infinitely higher in our estimation than all other books, we have no just acquaintance with its value, nor can we expect any communication of its treasures to our hearts. The remembrance of the holiness of God stamped upon its every sentence is essentially necessary to a profitable study of its contents.§ Let us cultivate the spirit of Cornelius

* Numb. xxii. 18. † 2 Pet. i. 19. ‡ 1 Thess. ii. 13.

§ The Jews' frontispiece to their great Bible, is Jacob's expression of fear and astonishment upon his vision of God at Bethel—“How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven! ‘So ought we,’ as Dr. Owen remarks upon this, ‘to look upon the word with a holy awe and reverence of the presence of God in it.’

“I would advise you all, that come to the reading or hearing of this book, which is the word of God, the most precious jewel, and most holy relic that remaineth upon earth, that ye bring with you the fear of God, and that ye do it with all due reverence, and use your knowledge thereof, not to vain-glory or frivolous disputation, but to the honour of God, increase of virtue, and edification both of yourselves and others.” Cranmer's Judgment of Scripture, p. 20.

and his company, as an example of the Christian's regard for the message of God—"Now, therefore, are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God."*

162. I REJOICE AT THY WORD AS ONE THAT FINDETH GREAT SPOIL.

THE "awe" in which we should "stand of God's word," so far from being a hinderance to our enjoyment of it, is, as we have just hinted, the most suitable preparation for the due reception of its delights. In receiving every word of it as the condescending message from him, before whom angels veil their faces, we shall find the disposition to "rejoice at it, as those that find great spoil." Often had David found great spoil as the fruit of his victories,† but greater joy had he never found in his richest spoil than he had now discovered in the word of God. It is under this figure that the joy of the world at the advent of Christ is illustrated—"They joy before thee—as men rejoice when they divide the spoil."‡ Evidently, therefore, the expression of delight intended to be conveyed was of no common degree. If, then, the saints of old could realize such treasures and such enjoyment in the word, when blessed with so scanty a portion of it, can we who have the entire revelation of God as our portion, forbear to acknowledge—"the lines are fallen unto us in pleasant places; yea, we have a goodly heritage?"§ Perhaps also this expressive image may remind us of the inward conflict necessary to acquire a spiritual interest in this precious word. It is so contrary to our natural taste and temper, that habitual self-denial and struggle with the indisposition of the heart can alone enable us to "find the spoil." But what "great spoil" is divided as the fruit of the conflict! What a rich and abundant recompense is in reserve for the "good soldier of Jesus Christ," who is determined through the power of the Spirit to "endure hardness," until he overcome the reluctance of his heart to this spiritual duty. He shall "rejoice" in "finding great spoil." Sometimes it may be found unexpectedly, as the lepers

* Acts x. 33. On this particular a hint from a heathen may not be unworthy of our remark. "Ehud said to Eglon, I have a message from God unto thee. And he arose out of his seat." Judges iii. 20.

† At Ziklag—1 Sam. xxx. 19, 26—31. From the children of Ammon, 2 Sam. xii. 30.

‡ Isa. ix. 3.

§ Psalm xvi. 6.

found great treasure of gold and silver in the Syrian camp.* Sometimes we see the riches and treasures contained in a passage or doctrine, long before we can make it our own. And sometimes, when we gird ourselves to the conflict with indolence, and wanderings, under the weakness of our spiritual perceptions and the power of unbelief, many a prayer and many a sigh is sent up for divine aid, before we are crowned with victory, and, as the fruit of conquest, enabled to appropriate the word to ourselves, so as to "rejoice at it."

It is evident, however, that from a cursory, superficial reading of the word of God, no such fruit can be anticipated. When, therefore, the flesh or the world have deadened our delight in the word of God, and taken from us this "great spoil," should not our sorrow be as great in our loss, as was our former joy in our triumph? Why do we not regain our spoils? Because we do not feel their loss. O do not, then, since there are such treasures found and enjoyed in this field of conflict, lose your interest in them by the indulgence of presumption, heartlessness, or despondency. Before you attempt to read, put up an earnest prayer, under the sense of utter helplessness to perform one spiritual act, for the powerful help and Almighty teaching of the Spirit of God. Then you shall persevere with unconquerable and unwearyed vigour, and not fail to share in the blessed fruits of victory—views of a Saviour's dying love—an interest in the precious blessings of the cross—"great spoil"—unsearchable riches."†

163. I HATE AND ABHOR LYING; BUT THY LAW DO I LOVE.

THE affections of the soul are so opposed to the character and will of God, that it is natural to love what God hates, and to hate what God loves. But when a new principle and bias are given to the heart, it falls in with the dictates of God's law, as before it had acted in resistance to it. "Lying" is now "hated and abhorred" as contrary to "a God of truth," and the "law" is now "loved" as the reflection of his image, and the manifestation of his will. David had before made these dispositions the subject of prayer;‡—and the answer to his prayer was clearly manifested in the

* 2 Kings vii. 8. † Eph. iii. 8. ‡ See Verse 29.

expression which he here gives to the strength of his affections. For, indeed, a slight disinclination to a sinful course would prove a very ineffectual guard against it. Nor would a general interest in the law of God be a permanent principle of vital godliness.—But here David expresses that deadly hatred and abhorrence of sin that will admit of no reconciliation, and that habitual love to the law of God, influential in its character, and the seal of a Divine impression upon his heart. Under this “lying,” however, of which he declares his rooted abhorrence, he intended to include not only those more or less direct deviations from truth of which he had himself been guilty,* but, as we have before had occasion to remark,† whatever should be found in any shape or form, or degree, inconsistent with the truth of God.

Well had it been for Eve, had she turned from the tempter’s lie with the determination that is here exhibited.‡ But—“ye shall not surely die”—has from that moment been a most effectual instrument in captivating unwary souls into his fatal snare. So plausible is it in itself, so agreeable to the desires and inclinations of the lusting heart, that, when applied by the subtle adversary, it is received, and cherished, even where the wretched victims are assured in the first contest with the temptation, that its “deceit is falsehood.” But they do not “hate and abhor it,” they do not flee from it, as a concern for the honour of God and their own safety would lead them, and therefore, as the fruit of their delusion, and the punishment of their unfaithfulness, they are eventually “given up to believe it.”§ If, then, we are ever tempted by the flattery and allurements of the world, let us only mark the standard, taste, maxims, and pursuits set before us, how opposed they are in their character and tendency to the truth of God, and we shall probably turn away with hatred and abhorrence.

But must not those who are “made overseers of the purchased flock”|| of Christ—yea, all “who earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints,”¶—feel it to be a matter of most anxious watchfulness to mark any deterioration of doctrine or principle—any deviation from the simplicity of the gospel, and brand it as a lie?—

* Compare 1 Sam. xxi. 2, with Abimelech—twice with Achish, 1 Sam. xxi. 13; xxvii. 10.

† See on Verse 20. ‡ Gen. iii. 4—6. § 2 Thess. ii. 11. || Acts xx. 28.

¶ Jude 3.

“I have not written unto you,” said the venerable Apostle, “because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar, but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ.”* And will not the licentious abuse of the doctrines of grace be instantly abhorred by the Christian’s heart as the suggestion of the father of lies? “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid!”†

Believer! do you wish to have your hatred and abhorrence of every kind of lying strengthened with that detestation, which will give you increased power of resistance? Do you long to have every passion of the soul—“indignation, vehement desire, zeal, revenge”‡—summoned against it? Then learn to “abhor” it—not only as *your* enemy—but as God’s.§ Pray, that the arrow of conviction may be dipped in the blood of Christ; and if the wound inflicted be deep and painful, it cannot be mortal. Mortal, indeed, it will be to the sin, but healing to the soul. And do not forget to seek that your sorrow for sin may be soothed by a sense of reconciliation; and be assured, that never will your hatred of it be so perfect, as when you feel yourself sheltered from its everlasting curse.|| And let your daily walk and conduct manifest the inseparable connexion of a holy hatred of lying vanities and lying ways with a love for the law of God.

164. SEVEN TIMES A-DAY DO I PRAISE THEE, BECAUSE OF THY
RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENTS.

THE man of God had just spoken of his fear, joy, and hatred. He now speaks of his love—or the expression of his love in praise. And, indeed, it is the mixture of praise with prayer in this psalm, that makes it so complete an exhibition of Christian experience. Early and late, and habitually throughout the day, have we seen this man of God “give himself unto prayer.”¶ And here it appears that his spirit of “supplication,” in strict conformity with the Apostolical rule, was invariably mingled “with thanksgiving.”** “Seven times†† a-day do I praise thee.” If we

* 1 John ii. 21, 22. † Rom. vi. 1, 2. ‡ 2 Cor. vii. 11. § Comp. Ps. cxxxix. 21, 22. || Compare Ezek. xvi. 63; xxxvi. 31; xx. 43. ¶ See on verses 147, 148. ** Compare Phil. iv. 6. †† Seven times—that is—continually. Prov. xxiv. 16.

live in the atmosphere of praise, feeling that “it is good for us to draw near to God,”* we shall not need any rule to define the frequency of our praises, any more than it would be necessary to prescribe a limitation to our visits to a beloved friend, to whom our obligations were daily increasing. A spirit of love will answer every scruple, and banish all apprehensions of offence, on whichever side of the boundary we might happen to move. Young Christians, indeed, may sometimes unwarily subject themselves to a “spirit of bondage,” in constraining their consciences to set times for duty, the frequency of which may intrench either upon the circumstances of the outward man, or the weakness of the inward man. But let not any given number of times be thought indispensable to form acceptable service. Though our rule of service is not to be measured by our indolence, yet it must be accommodated to those daily engagements of our individual calling, which, when “done as to the Lord,”† constitute as real and necessary a part of our religion, as the more spiritual sacrifices of prayer and praise. If any particular time (beyond the Sabbath employment, and “the morning and evening sacrifice”) is observed *because it is the time*, however wearied our spirits may be, or however the occasion may interfere with immediate duty, we have forgotten the weighty instruction of one well-qualified to speak—“Bodily exercise profiteth little;”‡ and we must go and learn what that meaneth—“I will have mercy and not sacrifice.”§ It will, however, be usually found, that growth in grace—bringing with it an habitual relish for spiritual intercourse with God, and enabling the young Christian to bring the spirit of this intercourse into the general mould of his walk and conversation—will find for each duty of the day its proper place. As his views become more solid and settled, his services will become more free, and his obedience more evangelical.

But the formalist, considering “seven times a-day” to be an infringement of the sacred canon—“Be not righteous over much”||—pays his customary service twice a-day. He says his prayers, and he says his praises too, and his conscience slumbers again. And it is sad to think that

* Psalm lxxiii. 28. † Col. iii. 23. Eph. vi. 7. ‡ 1 Tim. iv. 8.
§ Hosea vi. 6, with Matt. ix. 13: xii. 7. || Eccles. vii. 16.

there should be times of slumber with the Christian, when he little differs from him. Oh! let us be alarmed at every symptom of such a state, and “find no rest to our spirit,” until we have regained some measure of this frame of hearty and overflowing praise. If there be a heavenly nature, there must be a heavenly work. Tongue and heart should be set on fire by love. But the Christian sometimes feels that he must not praise. He has no sensible token of love to call him forth, and therefore his harp is suffered to “hang upon the willows,” and he cares not to take it down even to “sing one of the Lord’s songs in this strange land.”* Well would it be for him to remember, that the service of praise is the most successful means of resistance to the despondency of unbelief. Many have found with Bunyan—‘When I believe and sing, my doubting ceases.’ Often has the act or even the attempt to praise proved a quickening ordinance to overcome the complaint of dullness in prayer—Do you say then, drooping soul, I am so cold, I cannot praise? Endeavour to bring to mind some spiritual or even temporal mercy that you may have received. Or if recollection fails you, open your Bible; turn to some subject of praise, such as the song of the angels at the birth of our Saviour,† or the song of the redeemed to the honour of the Lamb;‡—Have you no part or interest in it? Do you not need the Saviour? Can you be happy without him? Then inquire, and feel, and try, whether you cannot give “thanks unto God for his unspeakable gift.”§ Peradventure your notes may rise into praise, and in the excitement of praise, prayer will again mingle itself with its wonted enjoyment. It is no less your folly than your sin to drench your spirits in continual depression, which unfits you for the exercise of every department of the duty and privilege of the gospel. If assistance be needed for this blessed work, we cannot forbear the remark how fully the liturgical services of our church provide matter to sustain the elevation of the soul heavenwards. Language better adapted for strengthening the weak endeavour of the aspiring soul will not readily be found, consecrated as we may almost consider it to be, in the remembrance of its acceptable use by a throng of the Lord’s favoured people during successive generations, now united

* Psalm cxxxvii. 2, 4. † Luke ii. 13, 14. ‡ Rev. v. 12. § 2 Cor. ix. 15.

to the general assembly above, and worshipping with everlasting acceptance “before the throne of God and the Lamb.”

But the subject of praise that appears to have dwelt much upon the Psalmist’s mind was the Lord’s “righteous judgments”—probably referring to his decrees and declarations respecting his church. And this is a matter that has often called forth the expression of adoring thankfulness—“O Lord, thou art my God,”—said the enraptured prophet in the name of the church,—“I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things: thy *counsels of old are faithfulness and truth.*”^{*} Inscrutable, indeed, they may sometimes appear; and opposed to our best prospects of happiness; yet the language of faith will be, in the darkest hour—“We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”[†] But neither “seven times a-day,” nor “seventy times seven,” will satisfy us in heaven. The song of “Moses and the Lamb” is occupied, with this theme of the Lord’s “righteous judgments,”[‡] and for this ever “new song” the harps of God will never be unstrung, and never out of tune throughout an eternity of praise.[§]

165. GREAT PEACE HAVE THEY WHICH LOVE THY LAW, AND
NOTHING SHALL OFFEND THEM.

EVERY feature of the covenant of grace bears some resemblance to the nature of the covenant, full of grace, peace, and love. Two of the agents in the covenant are fitly represented by the lamb and the dove—emblems of peace. The tendency of its principles, “is first pure, *then peaceable.*”^{||} The end of it will be peace—universal peace—“They *shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain.*”[¶] The present enjoyment of it is *peace*—“*great peace*”—the heritage of those, “which love the law of God.”

Christian! Have not you discovered the connexion of peace with love for the whole revealed will of God? Look-

^{*} Isaiah xxv. 1. This appears also to have been the subject of David’s midnight praises, verse 62.

[†] Rom. viii. 28. [‡] Rev. xv. 3, 4. [§] Ibid. iv. 8. ^{||} James iii. 17.

[¶] Isaiah xi. 6—9. Comp. ii. 4.

ing at it as *the law of truth*, did it not disturb your peace of self-satisfaction and self-delusion—the first step to the attainment of a solid habit of peace? You learned to see yourself as God sees you. Every fresh view humbled you more than ever. Your dissatisfaction exercised you in an anxious and diligent search for true peace. And then, looking at it again as “*the law of faith*”—here is your ground of peace laid open to you—Your way to God is clear—your acceptance free—your confidence assured—your communion heavenly. The blood of Christ having reconciled you to God, you “have peace with him through our Lord Jesus Christ,” yea, you are “filled with peace, *all peace in believing*.”* And have not you equal reason to “love this law,” as a *law of obedience*? Does not this view of it bring a large measure of “peace” to your soul? Here you have your question answered—“Lord! what wilt thou have me to do.”† Let “this word dwell in you richly in all wisdom,” and it will be your daily directory of life and conduct. You will have a gracious taste to “delight in it after the inner man.”‡ Walking in the light of it, you will go on to the full “enjoyment of peace.”—“Taking cheerfully your Saviour’s yoke upon you, and learning of him, you will ever “find rest unto your soul.” “All his paths are peace.”§

Professor! What do you lose by your indulged indifference to the law of God? Need we tell you, does not your own conscience tell you, that you are a stranger to this peace—this “*great peace*?” A secret root of idolatry cankers the principles of peace. Notions will not bring it to you—Nothing but the vital spirit of godliness—the “love for God’s law”—“the truth received in the love of it,” will realize the blessing.

Believer! be not disheartened, though your “love to the law” be so weak, interrupted, clouded, that sometimes you are led to fear, that you have no love at all. Do you not mourn over the coldness of your love? Do you not desire to love? Seek to know more of the constraining influence of the love of Christ. However you may complain, that your chariot wheels, like those of the Egyptians, “drive heavily,” you will then move, like the chariots in the pro-

* Rom. v. 1, 10, 11; xv. 13. † Acts ix. 6. ‡ Rom. vii. 22. § Matt. xi. 29, Prov. iii. 17.

phet's vision, "upon wheels and upon wings."* At least you are on the way to peace, if not in the actual enjoyment of it; it cannot be far off. It will soon visit you in a sense of reconciliation with God,† issuing in a quiet acquiescence of soul under his wise and gracious dispensations?‡ "The Lord is your shepherd," and, dwelling near the shepherd's tent, "you shall not want."§ Nothing comes to you without his appointment; and whatever he takes away was only what he had first given, and leaves you nothing but to say—"Blessed be the name of the Lord."|| Whatever he lays upon you is infinitely less than you deserve, and with the fatherly design "to do you good at the latter end."¶|| Whatever he gives you is peace—"great peace"—"perfect peace,"** and though at best a chequered gift, yet—as the earnest of that "peace into which the righteous shall enter when taken away from the evil to come"—††—it is an incalculable blessing.

The steadfastness of our profession is a most important fruit of this blessing of peace—"nothing shall offend them." The daily cross,‡‡ the humbling doctrine,§§ the fiery trial|||—which, by offending the professor, detect the unsoundness of his heart—are to the faithful lover of the precepts of God the source of continual strength and comfort. Those who were stumbled by tribulation or persecution, were they, who "had no root in themselves."¶¶ Hence, therefore, there was no love in their hearts—consequently no peace in their experience, and no stability or perseverance in their walk. The frequency of such cases in a day of profession is a subject of constant and most painful observation. A course of religion is commenced under the impulse of momentary excitement, as unable to withstand the power of temptation as "a reed shaken by the wind." The first storm beats down all resolutions that were not formed upon the conviction of utter helplessness, and in entire dependence upon the sufficiency of Divine grace.*** But the power of genuine love will prove the soul's safeguard against all grounds of offence. The gospel has been embraced on a fair calculation of the cost, from a deep sense of its value, and from a spiritual perception of its character and application to our wants. Thus we hear objections taken to the doctrine of the total deprava-

* Compare Exod. xiv. 25, with Ezek. i. 15, 23. † Comp. Col. i. 20, 21. ‡ Phil. iv. 6, 7. § Psalm xxiii. 1. || Job i. 21. ¶ Deut. viii. 16. ** Isaiah xxvi. 3. †† Isaiah lvii. 1, 2. ‡‡ Mark x. 21, 22. §§ John vi. 60, 65, 66. ||| Matt. xiii. 21. ¶¶ Mark iv. 17. *** Comp. John xv. 5. 2 Cor. xii. 9.

vity of man. But “love to the law of God”—moulding our minds into its Divine impression—will remove all ground of offence. Much may be advanced by the pride of man’s wisdom against the doctrine of the cross and the freeness of the grace of God. But we love it as a part of “the law of faith.” It suits our case. It answers our necessities—and therefore here also “nothing offends us.” Thus whatever be the ground of offence—whether from the church or from the world—whether from Satan or from himself—“love to the law of God” enables the believer—instead of being “tossed to and fro” by the restless power of conviction—to “make straight paths”* for his feet throughout his heavenly pilgrimage. If ever his cross be grievous, he seeks from the Lord a quiet and submissive spirit, and thus, “in patience possessing his soul,” he finds “the yoke easy and the burden light.”† The difficulties of his path serve to exercise and strengthen his faith, and to add fresh testimony to the faithfulness of the promise. Whether, therefore, his way be dark or light, he is at peace; and all will end at last in a richer enjoyment of his Saviour’s love, and in a clearer testimony in his own heart, that “the work of righteousness”—of “love to the law of his God”—“shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.”‡

166. LORD, I HAVE HOPED FOR THY SALVATION, AND DONE THY
COMMANDMENTS.

THE experience of the “great peace” that is connected with the love of God’s law, is at once the fruit of faith and the motive of obedience. And the recollection of the enjoyment of it leads the child of God to give renewed expression to his faith and devotedness to his service. “In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love.”§ This is the characteristic of the New Testament church. Now mark the same principle and the same object of faith in the Old Testament believer—“I have hoped for thy salvation”—and the same working of faith—I have “done thy commandments.” “Walked they not in the same Spirit? Walked they not in the same steps?” Faith is the exercise of the soul in a sense of need, in desire, and in trust. Faith goes to God on the ground of the promise—hope in the expecta-

* Heb. xii. 13, with Prov. iv. 25—27. † Luke xxi. 19. Matt. xi. 30.
‡ Isa. xxxii. 17. § Gal. v. 6.

tion of the thing promised. Thus hope implies the operation of faith. It appropriates to itself the object of faith. And it is a sure evidence that our hope is “a good hope through grace” *—such as “maketh not ashamed” †—when we are enabled to take hold of the promises held out as the objects of faith, and to stay our souls upon their “everlasting consolation.” Conscious unworthiness may give a trembling feebleness to the hand of faith, but the weakest apprehension of one of the least of the gospel promises assures of our interest in them all. Why may we not set all the fulness of the covenant before the weakest believer as well as before the strongest, and proclaim to both with equal freedom the triumphant challenge—“Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect?” “Who is he that condemneth?” ‡ No difference exists in the covenant itself, which belongs not to *the degree but to the principle of faith*; and therefore weak and strong have an equal interest in it, though not an equal enjoyment of it. The only distinction regards the strength to lay hold on the promise, and the dexterity to apply it. No soul can sink into perdition, that grasps the promise with the hand of faith, be that hand ever so weak and trembling. Yet if the promise did not hold us more firmly by its power than we hold it by our faith, who would ever attain the blessing? Nor let the believer be supposed to possess only a transient interest in it. For though our perception of it may be subject to much interruption, yet is it not still in the Bible—in the covenant of God—in the heart of God? And is it not constantly renewed to every successive exercise of faith? Hence, therefore, the repetition of the same act of faith is equally necessary every moment as at the first moment of our spiritual life. Whatever be our standing or experience in the gospel, we must exercise in every fresh coming to the Saviour the same “hope in God’s salvation” flowing from the principle of faith, as he who is making his first approach to Christ. Nay, it is probable that we may find the same or even greater difficulty than was felt at the beginning. For who has not discovered the difficulty of making application to Christ fearfully increased from the circumstance of the actings of faith not having been habitual? If the habit of faith is not cultivated, the operation of the principle on surprisals of temptation will be materially weakened. But the more faith

* 2 Thess. ii. 16. † Rom. v. 5. ‡ Ib. viii. 33, 34.

is regarded as the breathing of the soul, and the more constantly it is exercised in the successive occasions of every moment's need, the less perplexity and confusion will be experienced, when some especial communication of strength, or some distinct application of a promise, is required.

Now is not your experience, believer, familiar with such an illustration as this? You are exercised with wandering, defiling imaginations. You are distressed. You struggle against them, and again and again are overcome. You know the promise. You are acquainted with the remedy. But "the shield of faith" has been laid by. You have therefore to seek it, when you want it at hand for the use of the present moment; and thus you lie powerless, at a distance from the cure, instead of being able to bring your sin at once to Jesus—Lord, this is my trouble; this is the "plague of my heart;" "but speak the word only, and thy servant shall be healed."* It is from the neglect of the cultivation of this habit of faith, that the influence of the principle itself is wavering. Hope is consequently clouded, and the "confidence and rejoicing of hope," which as the evidence of our interest in Christ we are exhorted to "hold fast,"† is much impaired. Its very existence depends upon the principle of faith, and therefore its energy must vary according to the strength and constancy of faith.

But on what ground is this "hope for the Lord's salvation" built? On his faithfulness, not on our sincerity—on his truth, not on our perseverance—on his unchangeableness, not on our constancy.‡ It is built—not on the work of grace in us, but on the work of Christ for us—a work, which has satisfied every claim, provided every security, and pledged all the Divine perfections on our behalf—a work so finished and complete, that all the difficulties of salvation on the part of God are removed, and the sinner finds no hindrance in the way but himself; while he is warranted, though covered with guilt and defilement, to apply for full, immediate, and unconditional forgiveness. What, then, hinders the instant reception of the privilege, but that disbelief of the record, which—daring to "make God a liar"§—must not be, as is too often the case, lamented as an infirmity, (except, indeed, in cases of constitutional weakness) but watched, prayed against, and resisted, as a deep and aggravated sin?—What mars the present enjoyment of the

* Matt. viii. 8. † Heb. iii. 6, 14. ‡ 1b. vi. 17, 18. § 1 John v. 10.

blessing, but that self-righteousness, which — *looking at the fruits of faith* (contrition, love, diligence, &c.) *as pre-requisites for believing*—reflects upon the wisdom and grace of God, who has laid the foundation of a sinner's hope on his own dear Son,* irrespective of any warrant of faith in himself? We want to be fed with sensible comfort. But from whence? From feeling, or from faith? If from faith—yet not as the ground of dependence, (in which respect it is weak and worthless as any other grace) but as the medium of beholding the object of faith—otherwise we shall not only lose the peace and joy we are seeking, but lose it by our mistaken way of seeking.

How solid then is the basis of “the full assurance of hope for the Lord's salvation!” It is not that we shall be interested in it, when our faith is more established, our love more fervent, and our works more abundant. “But”—says the Apostle—“*ye are complete in him.*”† Your title is as perfect—your interest as secure, as ever it will be at the day of “*the redemption of the purchased possession*”‡ —Doubting soul! Let not, then, a sense of unworthiness paralyze your faith. As a guilty sinner, you are invited. As a willing sinner, you are welcome. As a believing sinner, you are assured. Why hesitate, then, to “lay hold of eternal life?” Is it presumption in the drowning man to attempt to swim to the rock of safety? Why then should not the sinking soul cast itself upon “the Rock of Ages?”—“Lord, I have hoped for thy salvation.”

Believer! “Behold!”—saith your Lord—“I come quickly—hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.” “Hold fast your confidence and the rejoicing of your hope”§—It is not of the trifling importance that professors, and even some Christians of a low standard, seem to imagine. An established confidence and ground of comfort is the evidence of your interest in the Lord's salvation.|| Without it—you will have no release from the spirit of bondage—no enlargement in Christian duties—no enjoyment of Christian privileges—no “growth in grace and in the knowledge of the Saviour”—no honoured usefulness in the church of God—“The things which remain will be ready to die.”¶ Rest not then satisfied with an occasional

* Isaiah xxviii. 16. † Col. ii. 10. ‡ Eph. i. 14. § Rev. iii. 11. Heb. iii. 6, 14. || See Heb. iii. 6. Whose house are we—if we, &c. Ib. 14. ¶ Rev. iii. 2.

gleam of light and joy, while your horizon is overcast with doubts and fears. Waste not that time in heartless complaints that had been far better employed in vigorous actings of faith. Let your faith exercise itself in constant dependence on Jesus, in importunate and restless supplications at the throne of grace, and in the habit of diligence—"giving all diligence"—at all times—in all ways—private and public—"instant in season and out of season." This—though not assurance—is the means and way to it—and "thus an entrance into" the joy, peace and glory of "the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour will be richly administered unto us."* We shall be released from the prison-house of despondency, and breathe the free atmosphere of adoption and heavenly love.

But we must not forget that this "assurance of hope," even in its weakest and lowest influence, is a practical principle:—"Every man that hath this hope in Christ purifieth himself, even as he is pure."† It is no inactive contemplation, but, the spring of life in perpetual motion—"I have done thy commandments." All obedience that springs not from this source is "dead works"‡—the fruit of self-will, self-righteousness, self-sufficiency. It may be that we attended on this service, or that we performed that duty. But what was the principle? Evangelical obedience can only flow from evangelical faith and hope. Love to Christ catches fire from the perception of his love to us—Without this perception, all is weariness, toil, and travail of soul in his service—duty, not privilege—constraint, not delight—conscience, not love—Hence the most assured believers will be the most devoted servants of their Master. "The joy of the Lord"—"the joy of faith," of acceptance, of communion—"is their strength."§ They live by faith, and as they believe they love—they conquer—they deny themselves—they lay themselves out for their Master's work.

But how can we "do his commandments" without a "hope for his salvation?" Only in proportion as we have assured our title to the promises of the gospel, can we take hold of them—plead them or receive their supporting influence—When, therefore, our perception is indistinct, our hold is weak, we are almost left to our own unassisted resources—and our course will probably be in the end that

* 2 Peter i. 5—11. † 1 John iii. 3. ‡ Heb. ix. 14. § Neh. viii. 10.

of "perpetual backsliding." Where there is no certainty, there can be little love, delight or diligence. *Active devotedness flows from assured acceptance.**

If, then, we are ever ready either to suspect the reality of "our hope, for God's salvation," or to refuse its consolations—two points will put it to the test—its ground and its fruitfulness. That its ground may be immoveable, let it be fixed on the Lord's salvation—"Christ in me, the hope of glory."† That its fruitfulness may be exhibited, let our

* See Cor. xv. 58.

† Col. i. 27. The writer—having ventured strongly to enforce the duty and privilege of Christian assurance—deems it right to give a more explicit statement of what appears to him the scriptural view of this much controverted subject. That a *sense of complete acceptance with God, grounded upon the Divine testimony, is attainable*—he has no doubt. The "covenant ordered in all things and sure," (2 Sam. xxiii. 5,) offers ample warrant for the most assured confidence. The promises of this covenant are full, free, multiplied, adapted to all possible diversity of cases—attested by the oath and seal of God for this declared end—"the full assurance of hope," the "strong consolation" of his people. (Heb. vi. 11—18.) The instructions of our Lord and his Apostles had the same blessed end in view. (John xv. 11; xvi. 33; 1 John v. 13.) The design and efficacy of his atonement—as contrasted with the weakness of the legal services—was to make his people "perfect as pertaining to the conscience." (Heb. ix. 9, with x. 14.) His people under both dispensations have ever maintained this sense of appropriation and conscious security. (Job xix. 25. Psalm xviii. 1. Cant. ii. 16; vii. 10. 2 Tim. i. 12. 1 John iv. 16; v. 19, 20.) The want of this assurance seems to be evidently reprov'd. (2 Cor. xiii. 5.) Exhortations to press forward to it are frequently given. (Heb. vi. 11. 2 Pet. i. 10.) The means of attainment are distinctly pointed out—(such as faith, Eph. i. 13. Heb. vi. 17, 18—obedience—Isaiah xxxii. 17. John xiv. 21—23. 1 John ii. 3, 5—love—1 John iii. 14, 18—21; iv. 7—diligence—Heb. vi. 11. 2 Pet. i. 5—11. The gift of the Spirit—Rom. viii. 16. 1 John iii. 24.) Now, if these dispositions are matters of consciousness, the blessing of assurance connected with them must be within the compass of Christian attainment.—Upon this ground, therefore, it seems most important to inculcate it for the conviction of the professor—the excitement of the slumbering—and the encouragement of the weak.

That Christian assurance is a privilege of the highest consideration is sufficiently evident from what has been observed of the enlargement of heart, peace, and joy consequent upon it—and of the spiritual discomfort and unprofitableness resulting from the want of it. We need only farther remark as illustrative of this point, the elevated support in suffering, (Job xix. 21—25. 2 Tim. i. 12,) and in the prospect of eternity, (2 Cor. v. 1. 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8,) derived from this source.

At the same time, however, the writer cannot, with many excellent men, so identify assurance with the principle of faith, as to stamp as unbelievers all that are destitute of it. So far, indeed, we must concede, that it springs from faith, and grows upon no other root—For—as connected with obedience, love, and the fruits and habits of faith—it ultimately resolves itself into a practical belief of the testimony. The want of assurance also is, in fact, a want of faith. For if faith were more habitually exercised, we should be more conscious of its existence—and consequently more assured of our interest in the blessings of the gospel. Clear views of evangelical doctrine—thus acted out in faith—and illustrated in the fruits of faith, will always issue in Christian assurance. Yet faith, and be-

love be abounding—let it be universal in its extent and practical in its influence—that it may command even the reluctant testimony of the world, and encourage some among

believing that we have faith, seem not to be identical. Nor does doubting of the existence of faith necessarily belong to positive unbelief. The most established saints of the old dispensation occasionally lost their *consciousness of the Divine favour*—that is, *their assurance* (Job xiii. 24: xix. 11. Psalm xlii. 1; xxxi. 22; lxxvii. 7—9; lxxx. viii. 7, 14—16;) while surely “the root of the matter”—the *root of faith*—was still “in them.” With the disciples—while they were ingrafted *by faith* as living branches of the true vine—the *privilege of assurance was prospective* (John xv. 1—5, with xiv. 20.) The faith, the pre-requisite for salvation—does not seem *necessarily* to imply an *appropriating interest in the gospel* (John i. 49, 50. Acts viii. 37. Rom. x. 9. 1 John v. 1.) The apostles exhort to *assurance* those “who had obtained like *precious faith* with them.” (2 Pet. i. 1, 10.) They write to *sincere believers that they might be assured believers*—plainly distinguishing between *believing unto life*, and “*knowing that we have life*,” and defining *assurance* to be rather the *strengthened exercise than the essential principle of faith*. (1 John v. 13.) They separate, again, between *faith* as the *result of hearing*, and the sealing of the Spirit, i. e. *assurance* as the *consequence of faith* (Eph. i. 13;) as also between “the things that are freely given to us of God,” and our knowledge or perception of them by the Spirit of God. (1 Cor. ii. 12.) Is our knowledge of these free gifts always distinct? And have we no part in them, till we have fully cleared up our interest in them? The right of the heir does not depend upon his consciousness of the validity of his title. *His interest*, though not *his enjoyment*, is as complete while he is an unconscious babe, or “is under tutors and governors,” as at “the time appointed by his father” for taking possession of the inheritance. (Gal. iv. 1, 2.) The “command” *instantly* to “believe on the name of Jesus Christ,” is indeed as binding upon us all as any part of the Decalogue. (John vi. 28, 29. 1 John iii. 23.) But if it is supposed to imply a *persuasion of forgiveness* (since faith is the means of obtaining forgiveness, Acts x. 43, xiii. 38, 39, xvi. 31,) it would involve the absurdity of believing *that we are accepted, that we may be accepted*. Thus forgiveness would be made to precede faith, instead of being the result of it. But as faith is the instrument by which we are ingrafted into Christ, (John xv. 4,) and brought into this state of acceptance, we must have *faith* before we can be in this state—consequently before we can *have assurance that we are in it*. It is not true that we are in this state till we believe—therefore, as it must be true that we are in it, before we can believe that we are in it—faith must be supposed separable from, and antecedent to assurance. Thus, again, if assurance be defined—as doubtless it may be—“*knowing whom we have believed*,” (2 Tim. i. 12,) consciousness supposes the previous exercise of faith on its object—that is—faith preceding assurance.

Nor do we see any very distinct marks of assurance in many of the exercises of faith recorded in the gospels. Sense of need—desire—use of the appointed means—and a spirit of dependence mainly characterized the applicants for the Saviour’s mercy—Doubts of his willingness (Matt. viii. 2, 3,) or his ability (Mark ix. 24,) mingled themselves with sincere workings of faith. Seldom did their dependence amount to *certainty*; and *appropriation* was generally rather the result than the principle of the application.

“The assurance of faith”—as it properly respects a *dependence upon the record*, is indeed the essential principle of Christian life. But “the assurance of hope”—implying a *conscious interest in the record*, and comprehending the *real principle of assurance*—seems to be a distinct and separable idea. The truth of the record—“*Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out*”—may be implicitly received; yet a *consciousness of coming, or of having come*,

them to "take hold of our skirt—saying, We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you."*

may be much obscured by negligence, self-righteousness, indistinct perception of the actings of faith, or the power of unbelief in some of its various forms—consequently there will be a doubt of an interest in the record—a *want of assurance*. For no man's name is in the record—but his character only—"The declaration is—" *He that believeth*" not *any particular individual mentioned by name*—"shall be saved." No man is commanded in the first instance to believe that Christ died *for him individually*—but *for such as he is*—for the unworthy—the guilty—the condemned—the perishing. This is the warrant of his application for his own case, the event of which will—*ultimately, if not immediately*—be appropriation and assurance.

The writer is deeply convinced that a lowered exhibition of the precious doctrine and inestimable privilege of Christian assurance has had a most unfavourable influence in deteriorating the standard of evangelical religion.—The doctrine, scripturally stated, is the life of Christian privilege—and the spring of practical devotedness. Where, therefore, it is defectively set forth—or scarcely set forth at all—or guarded with an over-anxious care against abuse—the privilege is but little known, and the springs of Christian exertion are weak and uncertain. And thus believers, too often in a weak, languid, and highly sinful state of unbelief, acquiesce in a feeble exercise of this vital principle, and indeed can scarcely be persuaded to aim at a healthy state and active habit of faith. They go about their duties, like an expiring person about his work; thinking of and caring for, all the detail of practical exertion; while the desirableness of health and strength, the Physician and the remedy, are given up in despondency. Their case is perfectly recoverable by due attention to the appointed means, and to the real nature and symptoms of their disease. Yet they sit down in the miserable and degrading conclusion, that their powers are paralyzed; and though they preserve the notion of spiritual life and the hope of salvation at last, yet they think they must be content to be feeble, comfortless, and unprofitable.

Much injury has also arisen from restricting the privilege of assurance to the higher walks and maturity of Christian experience. Does not the Apostle place it at the very threshold of the gospel, when he "wrote to *little children*"—"because their sins were forgiven them for Christ's name sake?" (1 John ii. 12.) And ought we not, after the inspired pattern, to "desire *every one* to give diligence" in pressing towards this mark? It is the common duty of all that are interested in the gospel. Diligence—as the habit of faith—is the appointed mean; slothfulness—as the fruit of unbelief—the main hinderance to its attainment. (Heb. vi. 11, 12.) The writer is fully convinced that it is the equal and common right of the youngest as well as the oldest member of the family of God—and (though the power of unbelief, slothfulness, or backsliding, may for awhile preclude the enjoyment of it) that it is linked to the first, as well as to any successive, exercise of faith—to its most trembling, as well as to its most collected, act. (Acts xiii. 38, 39.) Indeed, the first act of faith—where it is genuine—is at least as strenuous as any subsequent act: and perseverance in this act, where the hand is trembling, is not unfrequently the characteristic of the greatest decision, courage, and maturity. All, therefore, should be exhorted to assurance; nor should the youngest be satisfied without the attainment of it. Many do realize it at a very early stage of Christian experience. And where they fall short of it, it is not from defect in the object or in the warrant—but in the mean. The exhibition of the work of Christ is not appropriated with that simplicity which brings with it "joy and peace in believing."

The writer cannot, however, as he has before stated, absolutely identify faith and assurance.—He does not conceive adoption into the family of God "by faith."

* Zech. viii. 23.

167. MY SOUL HATH KEPT THY TESTIMONIES; AND I LOVE THEM EXCEEDINGLY. 168. I HAVE KEPT THY PRECEPTS AND THY TESTIMONIES; FOR ALL MY WAYS ARE BEFORE THEE.

EVERY grace grows in the heart, in proportion to the growth of the love of the word of God, and such love as David felt he was never tired of expressing. It was to him

(Gal. iii. 26,) to depend upon—or in all cases to be connected with—*consciousness* of this relation. A child may be fully assured that he is a child. But while an infant—and *when this relation was as real as at any subsequent period—he had no such consciousness*. And thus there are many dear children of God—who have no *consciousness that they are so*—yet they cry—they long—they walk, or they try to walk as children—and so *evince that they are children*. Or (to use another illustration) we may have light sufficient to distinguish objects and to guide us on our way, while yet we *do not see clearly*, and therefore *cannot possibly be conscious that we see clearly*. What judgment, we may also ask, must we form of the distressing and not unfrequent cases of constitutional infirmity—the characteristic of which is not so much positive unbelief (though there may be a mixture of this principle in the case) as a want of mental power (often sudden and unaccountable) to apprehend the objects of faith in any distinct gospel relation? They cannot be seen in their true light and bearing. The spiritual optics that should discern them—though not destroyed—are greatly obscured, so that the eye of sense and natural conscience fill the retina of contemplation with their own false views. This is a very different case from spiritual indolence, or want of laboriously distinct statement—that is—where the view of the elementary materials is clear—and wants only the exercise of industry in the arrangement of them. This is the state of a person in a swoon—not of a corpse. *The principle of life is not extinct, though the consciousness of it is wholly wanting*, and may continue so for some time.

If, again, assurance must be considered as the *essential principle of faith*—then all that are destitute of it must be in a state of unbelief. We have therefore to account for the strange anomaly of unbelievers—“knowing the plague of their own hearts,” hating sin, separate from the world, and renewed in heart, temper, life, and conduct. For such unquestionably (judging from daily and accurate observation) are many, who—though kept in bondage by their fear and doubts, and far from having attained a conscious interest in Christ—are yet (upon this supposition) *bringing forth the fruits of faith upon the root of unbelief*. Is not this a stumbling to the unconverted? Is it not rather a “despising” than cherishing “the day of small things?” Is it not “breaking” rather than binding up “the bruised reed?” Let us pray for faith to receive and to exhibit “the fulness of the blessing”—“the high calling” and consequent responsibilities—but not shut “the little ones” out of the camp. Like Jacob of old, and a more wise and tender Shepherd than he—we must “*gently lead those that are with young*.” (Gen. xxxiii. 13, 14. Isa. xl. 11.)

The Scripture—in the writer’s view of it—seems fully to warrant the distinction prevalent among the Puritan divines—of assurance being “necessary to the Christian—for his well-being, not for his being”—for his consolation and establishment, not for his salvation. For his own part—though he does not scruple to say—“He that *believeth not* shall be damned”—(Mark. xvi. 16:)—he dares not say—He that *is not assured* shall be damned, He would not, therefore,

the source of unceasing pleasure and cheerful obedience. And as he "loved the testimonies of God exceedingly," his "soul kept them." Indeed the bias of the new nature to "keep the precepts" is as prevalent as that of the old nature to sin. It is a principle in the heart uniting with the operation of the law to produce the work of obedience. While the one commands, the other constrains. There was a time with the believer, when he would have wished the law of God blotted out of the universe, or at least exchanged for one more indulgent to his own inclinations. But now that it is written in his heart, he cannot forbear to love it, and he would overcome every hinderance to its sweet restraint. He longs for a more close intimacy with it, and the clearer his discernment of its spirituality, the more satisfactory does he find it to his soul. There is not, indeed, one of the "precepts or testimonies" that he "keeps" as he ought, and as he desires, but there is not one of them that he does not prize, and "exceedingly love," and most anxiously desire to fulfil.

But the mournful consciousness of daily failures may make us shrink from so strong an expression of confidence. Alleged, however, as it is 'as an evidence of grace, and not as a claim of merit,'* there is nothing in this language, that the most humble believer need hesitate to adopt as the expression of Christian sincerity before God. David, though aspiring to no higher character than that of a poor sinner, was yet conscious of the "good work" of God in him—of desires supremely fixed upon him—of a heart (frequently mentioned in the Old Testament)† "perfect with him," three evidences of which he here adduces—spirituality of obedience, exceeding love to the divine word, and an habitual walk under the eye of his God.

have the trembling soul too hastily conclude against its faith, because its operations are not distinctly assured: at the same time, in receiving the testimony in simplicity, in accepting the Saviour whom it so clearly reveals, in coming to God by him in his own appointed way, and in abiding with him in "the obedience of faith"—he has no doubt but the assured confidence will be vouchsafed—"I know whom I have believed." (2 Tim. i. 12.)

* Bishop Horne.

† Compare verse 1. Marg. 2 Chron. xv. 17; xvi. 9; 2 Kings xx. 3. The import of the term is limited and explained by the word "upright" united with it, Job i. 8; Psalm xxxvii. 37. The Scripture use of the word may be said to refer rather to our desires than our attainments, (compare Phil. iii. 12—15,) and in general seems to mark Christian maturity as contrasted with the weakness of the babe and the inexperience of the young man in Christ. Compare the use of the same word *τελειος* in 1 Cor. ii. 6. Heb. v. 14.

Now let us ask—Do “our souls” thus “keep the Lord’s testimonies” habitually, perseveringly? Much as we must have to acknowledge in the way of humiliation, yet does conscience testify that they are uppermost in our minds—that we are “going on unto perfection?” And, while some are measuring out their scanty obedience by the rule of expediency, prudence, the example of those around them, or some other worldly standard, does our love seem ready to break through these barriers, as if it could never burn with sufficient fervour in the service of Him, “who loved us and gave himself for us?”* Why then should we shrink from the acknowledgment of “simplicity and godly sincerity” which is here made? If we are ready to own—that “without Christ we can do nothing,” that it is his Spirit that “has wrought all our works in us,”† that “by the grace of God we are what we are,”‡ that our hope of acceptance is in no degree grounded upon any measure of obedience, but solely upon the finished work on the cross—why should we refuse to confess the grace of God in us? We cannot at the same time forget, that it is only as we are holy and consistent in our walk, that this confidence can either be attained or preserved. Allowed unfaithfulness in the Lord’s service, neglect of secret prayer, impurity of motive, or any “iniquity regarded in the heart,” must be expected to weaken our confidence; and though we may not lose our hope of salvation, we shall rob our souls of the precious comfort of it, and shall be utterly unable to join in the expressions of delight and ardent love here described. How beautiful is that princely spirit, which will not serve the Lord “of that which doth cost us nothing,”§ that not only longs for holiness as the way to heaven, but loves heaven the better for the holy way that leads to it, and for the perfect holiness that reigns there eternally!

But if a fresh motive be wanted for obedience, let the recollection that “all our ways are before God,” serve to keep us steady in this straight and narrow path. Well would it be for us, if we walked less before men and more before God: if in secret, in business, at home and abroad, we heard the important words speaking to us—“I am the Almighty God: walk before me, and be thou perfect.”|| It is not

* Gal. ii. 20. † Isaiah xxvi. 12. ‡ 1 Cor. xv. 10. § 2 Sam. xxiv. 24. || Gen. xvii. 1.

what we appear before the world, or even before the church, that proves the spirituality of our profession. We may be unreprouable in the sight of men, while it is a mere artificial walk, grounded upon base external principles—a “walking after the flesh,” not a walk before God. And even in the path of Christian security, surely it would not be with us as it often is, if our eye were constantly fixed in dutiful reverence upon the Omniscient, Omnipresent eye of Jehovah. What influence would it have upon our business, our conversation, our secret duties! The path of uprightness would be followed with an habitually even course: “our eye would be single, and our whole body full of light.”*

Let me then, as bearing the profession of one of the Lord’s people, be awake to the full importance and powerful energy of this motive. Let me walk in the recollection that “all my ways are before him;” that every act, every thought, every desire, every word, is registered by conscience, as his vicegerent; and laid up in his book of remembrance.—When I am about to venture upon any line of conduct, let me consider that I have a watchful eye over me, piercing into the deepest recesses of my thoughts, and bringing, as it were, to day-light the principles by which my course is directed, and the end for which I move. Above all, let the recollection be present to my mind, that He, before whom are all my ways, is He that hung upon the cross for my sins. Let me then walk as if he were standing before me in all the endearing obligations of his love: Then surely I cannot be dead, insensible, sluggish in keeping his precepts: I cannot forbear to love him, and in the endeavour of love, I cannot forget his rule of direction—“If ye love me, keep my commandments.”†

* Matt. vi. 22.

† John xiv. 15.

PART XXII.

169. LET MY CRY COME NEAR BEFORE THEE, O LORD: GIVE ME UNDERSTANDING ACCORDING TO THY WORD.—170. LET MY SUPPLICATION COME BEFORE THEE: DELIVER ME ACCORDING TO THY WORD.

WE mark David here, where he always loved to be, a suppliant at the footstool of his God, seeking an audience with that faith, earnestness, humility and perseverance, which never failed to command the ear of his gracious Sovereign. And is not our own case, every moment, such as might well press out, after the pattern of this man of God, more earnest and frequent cries from the heart? We place little account on any peculiar richness of expression or fluency of utterance—the mere shell and external shadow of the duty. The life of prayer is the cry of the heart to God. The eloquence of prayer is its earnestness. The power of prayer is that which cometh not from education—or from the natural desire of the man—but that “which is from above,”—“the Spirit of supplication,”—“the Spirit of adoption.” When urgency of present need calls prayer into exercise—when the soul is at stake—when the enemy is within the walls—perhaps within the citadel—what other refuge have we, but in constant, importunate prayer? Oh! what a privilege at such seasons to know that we have a “strong habitation, whereunto we may continually resort;” to be able to remind the Lord—“Thou hast given commandment to save me, for thou art my rock and my fortress.”* But then we must see, that our “cry” comes before—“comes *near* before the Lord,” that nothing blocks up the way, or interrupts the communication. If we are believers, the way is open; “the middle wall of partition is broken down.” O let us be excited to greater nearness of communion. “Having boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh,”† why should we be backward to come? Except we had seen the way marked by this blood of sprinkling, we should (if we have had any sight into our own hearts) no more have dared to take one step into the awful presence of God, than to rush into

* Psalm lxxi. 3.

† Heb. x. 19, 20.

the devouring flame. If in a moment of extremity we felt that we must pray or perish, we should have had no boldness to open our mouths before God, much less to expect that our "supplication would come near before him," had we not been "made nigh by the blood of Christ."* But with this way open before us, why fearful that we should not be heard? Why cold and heartless in our supplications? "Let us rather draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith; for he is faithful that promised."†

But where we feel as if we did not, could not, reach the throne of grace, "is there not a cause?" It is not tracing the evil to its source to speak of the dulness and insensibility of our hearts. The cause of our distance from God must be traced to a deeper origin. The real difficulty of prayer, and, indeed, the actual inability to pray, arises in many, and probably in most cases, from a want of perception of the way of access. We can readily conceive of this, in regard to those who are totally ignorant of Christ; and the same must be admitted in the cases of weak, unestablished, or negligent Christians. Through ignorance of the fulness and freeness of the gospel in the one, and indulgence of sin or secret unwatchfulness in the other, the way of access (only perceptible by the eye of faith) becomes dim, the desire faint, the spiritual strength weakened. And instead of the acknowledgment—"The Lord hath heard the voice of my supplications,"‡ the mournful complaints are heard—"My soul cleaveth to the dust.—O that I were as in months past."§ We cannot wonder at this barren frame. Prayer without faith must ever be a heartless ceremony on the spirit of bondage—in either case utterly destitute of spiritual enjoyment. That which gives to it life and acceptance is the immediate connexion of the duty with the offices of Christ.|| The ignorant and self-righteous may find it a matter of course (at all times equally easy and equally fruitless) to bow their knee in the service of prayer. But the light that darts in upon awakened consciences—revealing something hitherto unknown of God and of themselves—opens it as a matter of the deepest mystery and most amazing difficulty to find any sufficient ground of confidence for a self-condemned sinner in his approach unto God. But such a confidence God has found and laid open. You cannot ho-

* Eph. ii. 13. † Hebrews x. 22, 23. ‡ Psalm vi. 9. § Verse 25. Job xxix. || Hebrews iv. 14—16; x. 19—22.

nour him more than by making use of it—Since all that come in the name of Jesus are welcome—seeking, penitent, distressed sinner, why should not you be welcome? The throne of grace was raised for poor empty sinners such as you. You cannot want larger promises or a better plea than meets you there. You come—not because you are worthy, but because you are bid to come. Take the command, and lay it upon your conscience. The endeavour to come will be an act of overcoming acceptable faith, such as will bring you nearer to God, if you have not hitherto come—or restore you to the blessed privileges from which you have wandered.

But again—supposing that in a state of departure from God, you may have been much engaged in active service, or even in the exercises of social religion; yet if these duties are substituted for secret communion with God, be assured, that “the things that remain in you will be ready to die,”* ordinances will fail to enrich, Christian fellowship will bring no refreshment, and your soul, while blessed with the abundance of means of grace, “in the fulness of its sufficiency, will be in straits.”† Indeed, if our affections and feelings are moved in social exercises, and are cold and insensible when we are alone with God, we have great reason to suspect our state. Especially, then, let us ask ourselves—What do we know of the comforts of the closet? We cannot expect to know them except we prize the throne of grace. Do we then pray because we love to pray, or only because our consciences will not allow us to omit a known duty? Does the Lord mark those secret transactions between himself and us, that manifest our hearts to be really drawn to him? Is it any pressing business of our soul’s salvation that brings us to God? Are our services enlivened with spiritual apprehensions of Christ? Is it not possible to continue for a course of years in the outward course of duty—and yet not one of our prayers has ever “come near before the Lord?” Perhaps we may have been wearying ourselves with knocking at the wrong door. Perhaps we have not come in the appointed way—and therefore we have never really come at all. Or if the name of Christ has been affixed to our prayers, has it not been rather as a component part of a formal system,

* Rev. iii. 2. † Job xx. 2.

than with any exercise of faith in building our hopes of acceptance upon it?

But it may be, that we have backslidden from God in a habit of indulged coldness or wilful iniquity. Now if we would expect "the candle of the Lord again to shine upon our heads, and his secret to be upon our tabernacles,"* we must rest satisfied with nothing short of the full restoration of our privileges. We must return to the Lord with deepened contrition in his appointed way, and wait for him to look upon us in secret, and again to "let our supplication come near before him." He had only "gone and returned to his place, till we acknowledged our offence and sought his face;"† and he is now to be found sitting on a "throne of grace," "waiting, that he may be gracious."‡ We have, therefore, much encouragement again to fall down before him, and to pray, and never cease to pray, until we feel that our "cry and supplication do come near before him," and spiritual understanding and deliverance are vouchsafed in answer to our cry.

But it is most beautiful to observe the Psalmist's faith—like oil, feeding the flame of his supplication. Every petition is urged upon the warrant of a promise—"according to thy word." Thus did the promises give him breathing in his supplication—excite his expectation for a favourable answer—and exercise his patience until the answer should come. Though in possession of so comparatively small a portion of the blessed book, he seemed always to find a word for the present occasion; always able to show to his God his own hand and seal. Alas! sometimes with the whole word of God before us, we are at a loss to appropriate one of its innumerable promises to the circumstances, wants, or difficulties of the day. But let us be ashamed of the narrowness of our desires, and our want of apprehension of the condescension of that love which accepts even the stammering language of faith in his children. The cry "Abba, Father," feeble as it may be—'though,' as Luther sweetly expresses it, 'it is but a cry, yet it doth so pierce the clouds, that there is nothing else heard in heaven of God and his angels.'§ And how

* Job xxix. 3, 4. † Hosea v. 15. ‡ Isaiah xxx. 18.

§ Luther on Gal. iv. 6. And again—'This little word Father, conceived effectually in the heart, passeth all the eloquence of Demosthenes, Cicero, and of the most eloquent rhetoricians that ever were in the world. This matter is not

delightful is the thought, that God's elect—as they will shortly be gathered a countless multitude around the heavenly throne*—so do they now hold spiritual communion with each other; while “they cry day and night”† to their Father at the throne of grace. True it is—we understand not one another's tongues. Yet does our loving Father understand us all. Nor do our different dialects cause any confusion in heaven, but rather unite in the heart, and form one cloud of incense ascending with continual acceptance and delight in his presence. “O my dove”—saith the Beloved to his Church—“that art in the clefts of the rocks, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.”‡

171. MY LIPS SHALL UTTER PRAISE, WHEN THOU HAST TAUGHT ME THY STATUTES.

How happy is it to go to God with a large and cheerful heart, and to be as large in praise as in prayer! The answer of the supplication for spiritual understanding and deliverance naturally issues in the sacrifice of praise. And never will deliverance from spiritual dulness fail to end in the language of rejoicing. Guilt, indeed, had sealed David's lips, while living in the commission of sin, restraining alike the utterance of praise and prayer. But when awakened to a sense of his sin, how earnest was he for restoration to the service of his Lord! “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation. O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.”§ And if, as in David's case, guilt has made us dumb, or we are so dull that we feel as if we had no matter for praise, we shall find the petition which he was continually sending up to God a suitable means to tune our hearts to the “songs of Zion.” Often as our tongue is fettered, yet when the Lord's statutes open to us the revelation of himself—as having given his dear Son for us and to us—and when his spiritual teaching applies this gift to our hearts, and seals our own interest in it,

expressed with words, but with groanings, which groanings cannot be uttered with any words of eloquence, for no tongue can express them.

* Rev. vii. 9. † Luke xviii. 7. ‡ Cant. ii. 14; also iv. 11. § Psalm li. 12, 15.

“the tongue of the dumb is made to sing”*—“Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift.”†

And do I remember the time, when a sense of pardoning love was applied to my heart, at once removing my guilt and my complaints—“plucking” me as “a brand out of the fire, and preparing for me a seat on the throne of God, giving me a taste, and assuring me of the completion of heavenly bliss? What *mercy* is this that is vouchsafed! What gratitude is demanded! “My lips shall utter praise now that he has taught me his statutes”—“O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me.”‡

I seemed to have sunk beyond the possibility of help. No means, no ministers, no providence could reach the extremity of my case. All were “physicians of no value,”§ tried and tried again, but tried in vain. But, in the midst of weakness thoroughly felt, “strength was made perfect.”|| The clouds were dispersed that threatened my ruin: the breaches were healed; the veil of unbelief was rent. “The right hand of the Lord hath brought mighty things to pass”¶—“He hath both spoken unto me, and himself hath done it”*** and “it is marvellous in our eyes.”†† Let my stammering “lips utter praise.” What a display of *power*! “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory.”‡‡

And, again—I was perplexed in a dark and bewildered path. Every dispensation of the Lord appeared to frown upon me. One dark hour had blotted out all the recollections of my former comforts, and it was as if I never could, never should, rejoice again. But little did I think, during the season of trial, how the Lord was “abounding towards me in all wisdom and prudence”§§—that he was “humbling me and proving me, to know what was in my heart,”||| and in the moment of chastening was speaking to me—“I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord: thoughts of peace and not of evil, *to give you an expected end.*”¶¶ What a display of *wisdom*! My “lips shall utter praise:” for if I “should hold my peace, the stones would immediately cry out.”*** But let me be mindful to main-

* Isaiah xxxv. 6. † 2 Cor. ix. 15. ‡ Isa. xii. 1. § Job xiii. 4. || 2 Cor. xii. 9. ¶ Psalm cxviii. 16. ** Isa. xxxviii. 15. †† Ps. cxviii. 23. ‡‡ Ibid. cxv. 1. §§ Ephes. i. 8. ||| Deut. viii. 2. ¶¶ Jeremiah xxix. 11. *** Luke xix. 40.

tain my privilege. The enemy envies my enjoyment of it: often has he robbed me of its precious consolations, and he is watching to rob me again. Let me, then, make much of secret prayer. Let me be separate from an insnaring world. Let me dread separation from my God. And when deadness or unbelief have estranged me from him, let me never rest until I once more walk in the light of his countenance. Let me "receive the atonement" afresh, believing that it is always presented and always accepted on my behalf. Thus let me fix the eye of my faith, weak and dim as it may be, constantly upon Jesus. He must do all for me, in me, by me. He must give me an abundant increase of "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation,"* that I may be taught more and more of the statutes of my God: that my heart may be delightfully engaged with my lips in uttering his praise.

172. MY TONGUE SHALL SPEAK OF THY WORD; FOR ALL THY COMMANDMENTS ARE RIGHTEOUSNESS.

To speak of God and for him will be the desire and delight of him whose heart and lips are much engaged in the secret utterance of his praise. Alas! how reluctant are we to this work! Our conversation with each other—how little is it often "seasoned" with grace!† So much of this poor world's nothing! So little of Jesus! But "if so be that we have tasted that the Lord is gracious," and if our hearts are under the constraint of his love, we cannot but commend him to others. "We cannot but speak" of his holy character, and his unbounded love. And, considering how hardly men judge of him, counting "his commandments grievous," and his "ways unequal,"‡ we shall be constrained to bear our testimony, that "all his commandments are righteousness"—restraining the power of sin, exciting to holiness of conversation, and in every way conforming the soul to his image.

Our meditation on this verse will be rendered profitable, by turning it into prayer. "Lord, open thou my lips, that my tongue may be speaking of thy word." Honour me O, my God, by helping me to show, that "all thy commandments are righteousness." If more recourse were had

* Eph. i. 17. † Col. iv. 6. ‡ Ezekiel xviii. 25.

to prayer, the tongue would be more ready to speak for God, and our speech would be more for "the use of edifying."* But it is not a superficial knowledge of the word that will cause our tongues to speak readily and with unction of its blessed contents. It must be made really our own; it must be known experimentally, in order to be enjoyed and recommended to others. And when this is the case with the servant of God, how cheering, how enlivening is his conversation! His "light so shines, that" they are constrained to "glorify his Father which is in heaven."†

Perhaps—believers—you may have been led to keep silence from supposed inability, natural bashfulness, or the narrowness of your sphere. But let circumstances be ever so unfavourable, still something may be said, as well as done, in the service of God. And whilst it is well carefully to watch against the "talk of the lips, which tendeth only to penury,"‡ do not forget the crafty devices of Satan to shut the mouth of the faithful witnesses of God. You have much need of watchfulness and prayer, lest through the scrupulous tenderness of your conscience, he "get an advantage of you," and by means of your silence, weaken the cause of your Master, which it is your sincere desire to support.§ Guard against the influence of unbelief. Let your weakness and inability be made the subject of unceasing prayer. Let any inconsistency of profession that you fear be searched out, examined and lamented before the Lord, and opposed in dependence on his grace; but never let it be made a covering for indolence, or supply fuel for despondency. Ask for the Spirit of God to guide your lips: so shall a poor weak sinner be permitted to show forth the praises of Him who is surrounded with all the hosts of heaven. But when our silence has arisen from carelessness and indolence too weakly resisted, the recollection of many precious opportunities lost of glorifying our Saviour, may well excite the prayer—"Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness."|| Oh! for that compassionate love, that would never suffer us to meet a fellow-sinner

* Eph. iv. 29. † Matt. v. 16. ‡ Prov. xiv. 23.

§ It was an excellent saying of Archbishop Usher, when in the society of his friends—"A word of Christ before we part."

|| Psalm li. 14.

without lifting up our hearts to God on his behalf, and making an effort to win his soul to Christ! What loss to our own souls in these neglected opportunities of bringing a blessing to the souls of others! Never do we get good to ourselves more fully than in the act or endeavour to do good to the souls of others. Every practical exercise of Christian love enlarges the heart for the reception of a more abundant blessing from above. Yet how much grace is daily and hourly needed thus to “make manifest the saviour of the knowledge of Christ in every place!”* If we are as full of matter as Elihu† was, nothing will be said for God—nothing that will “minister grace to the hearers”—unless the influence of the Divine Spirit is filling our hearts.‡ But if “the word of Christ is dwelling in us richly in all wisdom,§ it will be as “a well of water, springing up into everlasting life,” a blessing to all around us.

173. LET THINE HAND HELP ME; FOR I HAVE CHOSEN THY PRECEPTS.

IF we are encouraged to “come to the throne of grace,” that we may find “grace to help *in time of need*,”|| when are we not to come? For is not every moment a “time of need?” and what is left for us at such a time, but to flee to the “strong tower,” whither “the righteous runneth and is safe?”¶ Besieged without, betrayed within—“wrestling against flesh and blood,” and yet not against flesh and blood only,** surely we need all the help that Omnipotence itself can afford to enable us to sustain the tremendous conflict. Our claim upon the Lord’s help is, that we evidence the character of his people—“I have chosen thy precepts.” The same plea had before been urged with acceptance—“I am thine; *save me, for I have sought thy precepts.*”†† David had before spoken of the testimonies of God as his choice,‡‡ which—as including all the promises of the gospel, rich and free, extending to every necessity of time, and every prospect for eternity—was a most blessed portion for his soul. But, as it is possible to choose a heritage, and at the same time to reject the obligations entailed upon

* 2 Cor. ii. 14. † Comp. Job xxxii. 18—20. ‡ Comp. Eph. v. 18, 19. § Col. iii. 16. || Heb. iv. 16. ¶ Prov. xviii. 10. ** Eph. vi. 12. †† Verse 94. ‡‡ Ibid. 111.

it, the choice which he here intimates of the precepts is a far more discriminating feature of the character of the child of God. A happy choice, indeed, is this to make—the fruit of the Spirit's work upon the heart.* But, in making this choice, have we carefully considered, whether the way of the Lord's precepts may not be found too hard, too strait, too unfrequented—whether we are prepared to brave the pointed finger, and the whispered scoff of the ungodly, and perhaps the opposition of beloved friends, with mistaken tenderness resisting our course?†

Prompt obedience in the simplicity of the faith will form the character of this choice. Many carnal suggestions are ready to offer themselves, the moment that the purpose is forming into the choice. “The things that were gain to us,” and which now must be “counted loss for Christ,”‡ (should we allow them an entrance into our hearts at this crisis) will bring much hesitation and perplexity. Conferences “with flesh and blood” are amongst the most subtle hinderances to Christian determination.§ What will the world say? If I go too far, I shall give offence, and all my influence will be gone, and all my prospects of eventually benefiting those around me will be blasted. The apprehension, also, of losing the affection, and of incurring the displeasure, of those whom my heart holds dear, is most fearful. And then, this sacrifice is too costly to make—this pleasure too hard to resign. Thoughts of this nature—the injections of the tempter—are ever at the door, and even when effectual resistance is offered, the struggle is often most severe. But oh! it is such a mighty help, in this conflict, when one desire has taken sole possession of the heart—“Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”||—when we are so crucified to worldly influence, whether of pleasure, profit, fear, or esteem, as to be ready to act upon the resolution—“Wherefore, henceforth know we no man after the flesh.”¶ The want of a determined choice is the secret of much of that halting profession that prevails among us. A compromise is attempted with the world. “The offence of the cross” begins to “cease.” A middle path of serious religion is marked out, divested of what is called *needless offensiveness*—forgetting that the religion that pleases the

* See Ezek. xi. 19, 20. † Comp. Luke xiv. 26. ‡ Phil. iii. 7. § Comp. Gal. i. 6. || Acts ix. 6. ¶ 2 Cor. v. 16.

world will never be acceptable with God—nor will that religion that pleases God be ever accommodated to the inclinations of the world. At the same time, however, the difficulties belonging to a Christian profession clearly mark the spirit in which alone it must be formed. Often has it been taken up in haste, and as hastily relinquished.* He that wishes to abide by it, will engage in it with that conscious helplessness that will bring him upon his knees with the supplication—"Let thine hand help me."

Nor is this petition needful only in the first view of this choice, and in the first desire to appropriate it. In the growing and more decided conviction of its superior happiness, and in the daily endeavour to live in it, we shall find increasing need for the same acknowledgment of helplessness, and the same cry for support. And blessed be God for the assurance that he has "laid help upon one that is mighty,"† so that our insufficiency and all-sufficiency are visible at one glance, and "when we are" most "weak, then are we" most "strong."‡ "They that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of naught. For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee—Fear not, I will help thee."§

174. I HAVE LONGED FOR THY SALVATION, O LORD; AND THY LAW IS MY DELIGHT.

RELIGION will decay or flourish, as it is our duty or our delight. The mind is incapable of continued exertion for duty; but it readily falls in with "delight." In this frame Christ is the life of our duties, and thus our duties become our privileges. Every step of progress is progress in happiness. In these exciting exercises of the life of faith, no other interpreter than experience will be needed in the exposition of this verse. The restlessness of the soul, during the interruption of its heavenly enjoyment, sufficiently proves this language to be the expression of its own state. It is, indeed, the language of the believer in his drooping frame, when he is seeking restoration to his wonted communion with his God. But it is also his language in his most lively frames; for the more he knows and enjoys

* Compare Matt. viii. 19, 20. † Psalm lxxxix. 19. ‡ 2 Cor. xii. 10. § Isa. xii. 12, 13. Comp. the whole passage, verses 10—16.

of the Divine presence, the more he will long to know and enjoy of it. He finds this world's all to be really nothing—nothing to feed the appetite—nothing to quench the thirst of an immortal soul. It is a mark of a spiritual thriving frame, when earthly comforts and possessions are enjoyed, not “abused:”* when they are loved only as God would have them loved; and Himself and his salvation loved and longed for above all. The gospel provides a soul-satisfying portion, and when the soul is supremely engaged in the pursuit of it, nothing will give real rest but an answer to the prayer—“Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.”† The creatures are, as it were, commissioned to withhold the comfort we are longing for, that we may be driven to seek it alone in God—“Thou, O God, art the thing that I long for.”‡ With many, indeed, this longing is the chief evidence of a renewed heart.§ The work is more in desire than in enjoyment, and they can feel the Saviour in their desires, when they cannot discern him in their love. Yet such desires as these, if they exercise themselves in a growing and supreme delight in his law, will doubtless end in “the fruition of his glorious God-head.”||

But does not our Saviour still too often bring his complaint against us—“that we have left our first love?” The principle is not dead, but it is decayed—The measure and degree of its operations are abated—Who does not possess a nature prone to apostacy? Security and insensibility steal upon us unconsciously—and until we are prostrate under their influence, the danger is often scarcely perceived.—We do not meditate on the love of Christ. Faith is not in *habitual* exercise, and consequently we are left destitute of attractive views of the Saviour—We are satisfied with our former affections to him—We have little heart to labour for him—We abate in the use of those means in which we once enjoyed communion with him, and—as the natural consequence—we become cold in spiritual desires and warm in worldly pursuits;¶ and too often without any smittings of conscience for our divided love.

This declension of affection is considered, indeed, by some professors to be a matter of course. The young convert is supposed to abound most in love, and as he advances, his

* See 1 Cor. vii. 31. † Psalm xxxv. 3. ‡ Ibid. lxxi. 4, P. T. § See Neh. i. 11. || Collect for Epiphany. ¶ Rev. ii. 4.

fervour gradually subsides into matured judgment and experience. Many, indeed, who “have no root in themselves,” lose their lively affections and their religion with them.* But can we conceive the real principle of love to decay—that is—can our esteem of God be lowered, our “longings for his salvation” languish, our delight in the enjoyment of it be diminished, without bringing guilt and loss upon our souls? Our love is the Lord’s—He calls for it,† and it is most unreasonable to deny him his own. He is the same as when we first loved him. *Then* we thought him worthy of our highest love. Do we then repent of having loved him so much? Have we found him less than our expectations? Can we bestow our love elsewhere with stricter justice or to better advantage? Do not all the grounds of our love to him continue in full force? Have they not rather increased every day and hour? What would an indulgent husband think of incessant and increasing attentions repaid with diminished affection? And how insufficient a compensation would the most assiduous diligence in outward service prove for such a loss! Oh! let not this frame be indulged in slothfulness or self-delusion.—Let us remember (according to our Lord’s direction‡) the times when we “longed more for his salvation” than now—when we took more delight in communion with him—when we had more readiness to labour and suffer for him, and even to die to go home to his presence—Let us “repent” with deeper contrition—and “do our first works”—never resting till we have regained our delight in him—and can now take up the language of confidence and joy—“I have longed for thy salvation, O Lord.”

Some, however, of the Lord’s dear children are distressed in the conscious coldness of their spiritual affections—But if it be a mark of the decay of grace to “lose our first love,” it is at least a mark of the truth of grace to mourn over this loss. There is always a blessing for those “that hunger and thirst after righteousness,”§ though they have not attained to the full extent of their desires. Their restless desires after Christ are the beating pulse of the life within—and if there be not always a *sensible* growth of desire and enjoyment, there may be (as with the trees in

* See Matt. xiii. 20, 21. † See Prov. xxiii. 26. ‡ See Rev. ii. 4, 5. § Matt. v. 6.

winter) growth at the root, in a more fixed habit of grace and love, in a deeper spirit of humility, and in a more established principle of self-knowledge and simplicity. Yet I would rather lead you, trembling soul, to look off from your own longings to the "salvation" itself, that is, to the proper object of faith herein revealed.* Your frames and feelings, though true evidences of grace, are subject to continual variation, and are very uncertain grounds of support, especially in the hour of temptation. "Looking" singly "unto Jesus" as your peace and your life, is at once your duty, your privilege, your safety, and the secret of your daily progress in the way to heaven.

After all, whatever may be the intensity of our desire, it is infinitely below the object set before us. Yet while the weariness still cleaves to us as the remains of the old nature, the renewed nature continues to act in the "longing and delight" which is here expressed. And, indeed, such is the mutual connexion of these two exercises, that while "delight in the law of God" will necessarily produce a "longing for" the full enjoyment of his "salvation, this holy "longing" will expand itself in an habitual "delight in his law." And this proves the false character of many who conceive themselves to be "longing for salvation"—that their desires are unaccompanied with delight in the law of God as the means of obtaining and enjoying this salvation. But here was fervency, holiness, delight. And well will it be for us, if this beautiful Psalm and each verse of it should excite us to be followers of him, who evidently knew so much of the heavenly enjoyments of religion. Why should we not, why do we not, determine to know as much of God as we can? Why are our "longings for his salvation" so transient and so few? The soul that really longs shall "not be ashamed of its hope." Even to taste the present fruits, though it be but a taste, in a sense of reconciliation, liberty of access, a beam of the love of Jesus in the heart, is unutterable enjoyment. It strengthens the soul for the endurance of appointed trials, and for a devoted, self-denying, obedient walk. But if what we have known is but a taste of heavenly pleasures, let us long for fuller draughts. Let us seek for that hungering and thirsting of soul, which shall be fully satisfied, but, which will not, cannot, be satisfied with any thing

* See Heb. xii. 2.

short of the fulness of God.* There are heights and depths of spiritual communion, yet unexplored, and it is an encouragement to remember, that he who has vouchsafed large attainments of them to others, “is *rich* in mercy to all that call upon him:”† that the fountain of everlasting love is ever flowing, ever full; and that the gracious command to “open our mouths wide,” is accompanied with the promise that “they shall be filled.”‡

Lord! with whom alone is the power to work in the hearts of thy people, create in our souls a more intense desire for thy salvation, and a more fervent “delight in thy law.”

175. LET MY SOUL LIVE, AND IT SHALL PRAISE THEE: AND LET
THY JUDGMENTS HELP ME.

WHAT is the light that the Psalmist is now praying for, but the salvation for which he had just expressed his longing? The taste that he has received makes him hunger for a higher and continued enjoyment, not for any selfish gratification, but that he may employ himself in the praise of his God. Indeed, as we have drawn towards the close of this psalm, we cannot but have observed the same character of praise pervade his experience, as has been generally remarked in the concluding psalms of this sacred book:§ and how much do we lose of spiritual strength for want of occupying ourselves more in the exercise of praise! Yet he alone is fitted for this heavenly employ, of whom it has been said, “This, my son, was dead, and is alive again.”|| And he who has “looked to the hole of the pit whence he is digged,”¶ who has been awakened to a sight of that tremendous gulf from which he is but “scarcely saved,”** will long to give utterance to the effusions of his bursting heart. Yet neither can he be stirred even to this delightful privilege, until the quickening influence of “the Lord and Giver of life” has been vouchsafed. Praise, therefore, springs from prayer—“Let my soul live, and it

* Comp. Eph. iii. 19. Psalm xvii. 15. † Rom. x. 12. ‡ Psalm lxxxix. 10.

§ Verses 164, 171, 172. The last six psalms are for the most part, throughout, the breathings of praise. They were probably written at the close of life, and may be considered as striking indications of a soul ripening for glory. As it is said of the perfumes of Arabia Felix, that they exhale their odours in the neighbouring provinces, so it is no marvel, if, as “the sweet psalmist of Israel,” drew near to the happy country, he should have inhaled its atmosphere of praise.

|| Luke xv. 24. ¶ Isaiah li. 1. ** 1 Peter iv. 18.

shall praise thee." When "life is breathed into our souls," our services will be enlivened, and we shall become in the noblest sense "living souls."*

Too often, however, the recollection of successive days furnishes so many grounds of complaint from the inconstancy, carelessness, and unspirituality of our hearts, that we almost forget to tune our instruments to praise. But while a deep and habitual search is or ought to be made within, let it never be unaccompanied with an humble yet assured confidence in the Lord's pardoning grace. The abominations of a desperately wicked and unsearchably deceitful heart may well lead us to sigh and cry before God, and to "abhor ourselves in dust and ashes."† Yet out of the lowest depths of abasement, we may behold a gracious Saviour whose blood applied to the conscience "cleanseth from all sin,"‡ who once "passed by us, and saw us polluted in our blood, and said unto us, when we were in our blood, Live,"§ and who still "holdeth our souls in life,"|| by covering our daily infirmities, and maintaining our state of everlasting acceptance before God.

But while the song of praise dwells on our lips for life thus purchased and thus freely given, let us be watchful to the health of the spiritual principle, and habitually to guard against whatever may impede its growth, or check its influence. For if the life within waxes low, praise will be dull and heartless; and on the contrary, when the believer is assured of his hope, when his prayer is fully answered—"Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee"—see how his spirit breaks forth, as if the kindling fire could no longer be restrained—"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."¶ The work of praise is now his nature, his element, his delight. No wonder, then, that he is earnest in supplications for the renewal of his spiritual life, that he may return to this sweet antepast of heaven—"Let my soul live." And, indeed, the more this life is known, the more will it be made the subject of prayer, for it is this life alone that gives relish to the animal life, or that makes existence tolerable to the heaven-born child of God. Such a one is not satisfied with the life-

* Gen. ii. 7. † Job xlii. 6. ‡ 1 John i. 7. § Ezek. xvi. 6. || Psalm lxvi. 9.
¶ 1 Peter i. 3.

less actings of a sickly existence: he longs for a spiritual revival! And yet, at his best moments, the recollection of insufficiency for his holy work never forsakes him. Every expression of praise, even after the renewal of his life, is followed with petition for help; "let thy judgments help me." Give me such an enlightened apprehension of thy word—of thy character—of thy perfections, as the God of my salvation, as may furnish abundant matter for unceasing praise, so that my daily experience may be—"Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ."*

176. I HAVE GONE ASTRAY LIKE A LOST SHEEP: SEEK THY SERVANT; FOR I DO NOT FORGET THY COMMANDMENTS.

THAT "all we like sheep have gone astray,"† is the testimony from the mouth of God, confirmed, if, indeed, it needed confirmation, by daily experience and observation. But it is very affecting that this should not only be the description of a world living without God, but the confession of God's own people—"I have gone astray like a lost sheep." That they should ever wander from privileges so great—from a God so good—from a Shepherd so kind! What can induce them to turn their backs upon their best Friend, and sin against the most precious love that was ever known, but something, that must, upon reflection, fill them with shame? It is common, and indeed natural, to cast the blame upon the temptation of Satan, the seductive witcheries of the world, or some untoward circumstances. But whoever deals honestly with himself, must trace the source of backsliding to his own heart, and say, "This is *my* infirmity."‡ And have we replaced what we have wilfully yielded up with any thing of equal or superior value? May not the question be asked of us, "What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death."§ But in this distance from the beloved fold, nothing is really enjoyed. It is as impossible for the child of God to be happy, when separated from communion with his God, as if he were in the regions of eternal despair. He has not lost, he cannot wholly lose, this recollection of the forsaken blessing. He cannot, therefore, forbear the cry, "Seek thy servant." 'I cannot find

* Eph. v. 20. † Isaiah liii. 6. ‡ 1 Peter ii. 25. § Psalm lxxvii. 10.
§ Rom. vi. 21.

my way back; the good Shepherd must seek me; once I knew the path, but now that I have wandered into by-paths, it is as if I had never known it, or, even if I perceived it, had neither power nor inclination to return into it. I have no guide but the Shepherd whom I have left.' How sweet then to contemplate his office-character: "Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out; as a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the dark and cloudy day."*

And cannot I set my seal to his gracious and faithful discharge of his office—"He restoreth my soul?"† Or do I want farther encouragement in seeking my return home? Let me, then, remember his own description of his tender faithfulness and compassionate yearnings over his lost sheep; not *showing* it the way back to the fold, and leaving it to come after him: but laying it upon his own shoulders and bringing it home; all upbraidings forgotten, all recollections of his own pains swallowed up in the joy that he hath "found the sheep which was lost."‡ And when I consider, too, that the express commission, that brought the Shepherd from heaven to earth—from the throne of God to the manger, and thence to the garden and cross,—was "to seek and to save that which was lost,"§ surely I am imboldened in the spirit of contrition for my wanderings to add the confidence of my faith—"I have gone astray like a lost sheep: seek thy servant." I cannot forbear to plead, that, though a rebellious prodigal, I am still "thy servant," thy child: I still bear the mark of a child,—“I do not forget thy commandments.” I still, therefore, retain my interest in the covenant promise. Nothing can erase thy law, which was "written in my mind and inward parts"|| by the finger and by the Spirit of God, as an earnest of my adoption—as the pledge of my restoration. Thus, again, I hope to be received as a "dear" and "pleasant child;"¶ again to be clothed with "the best robe," to be welcomed with fresh tokens of my Father's everlasting love,** and to be assured with a blessed interest in the precious promise—"My sheep shall never perish, and none shall pluck them out of my hand."††

Such probably, Christian reader, would be the application we should make of this verse to ourselves; and such a peni-

* Ezek. xxxiv. 11, 12. † Ps. xxiii. 3. ‡ Luke xv. 4—6. § Luke xix. 10. || Heb. viii. 13. ¶ Jer. xxxi. 20. ** Comp. Luke xv. 22, 23. †† John x. 28.

tent confession of our backslidings united with a believing dependence on the long-tried grace and faithfulness of our God, would form no inappropriate conclusion to our meditations on this most interesting psalm. We would unite the publican's prayer with the great Apostle's confidence: and while in holy brokenness of heart we should wish to live and die, smiting upon our breast, and saying—"God be merciful to me a sinner"*—the remembrance of our seal of adoption would warrant the expression of Christian assurance—"I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him, against that day."† Yet, as it regards the experience of David, is there not something striking, and we had almost said, unexpected in the conclusion of this psalm? To hear one—who has throughout been expressing such holy and joyful aspirations for the salvation of his God, such fervent praises of his love, that we seem to shrink back from the comparison with him, as if considering him almost on the verge of heaven—to hear this "man after God's own heart," sinking himself to the lowest dust, under the sense of the evil of his heart, and his perpetual tendency to wander from his God, is, indeed, a most instructive lesson. It gives an accurate view of the conflict that must be sustained to the end in the believer's heart and of the opposite graces which meet and flourish there. The highest notes of praise mingling with the deepest expression of humiliation, combine to form that harmony of service which ascends "like pillars of smoke"‡ with acceptance before God. And thus will our Christian progress be chequered, until we reach the regions of unmixed praise, where we shall no longer mourn over our wanderings, no longer feel any inclination to err from our Shepherd's presence, no more experience the wretchedness of distance from him, or the difficulty of returning to him—where we shall be eternally safe in the heavenly fold, "to go no more out."§ For *"he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them; they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them nor any heat: For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."*||

* Luke xviii. 13. † 2 Tim. i. 12. ‡ Can. iii. 6. § Rev. iii. 12. || Rev. vii. 15—17.

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